

UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER

Narrative, Object, Witness: The Story of the Holocaust as Told by the Imperial War  
Museum, London

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Doctor of Philosophy

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This Thesis has been completed as a requirement for a postgraduate research degree of the  
University of Winchester

## **Declaration**

No portion of the work referred to in the Thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or institute of learning.

I confirm that this Thesis is entirely my own work.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER

ABSTRACT

FOR THESIS

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

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On June 7, 2000, the Holocaust's position as an official part of British history and memory became solidified with the opening of a permanent Holocaust exhibition within London's Imperial War Museum. This important national museum embodies Britain's cultural memory of war, of which the Holocaust has become a central part. Situated within debates of museology and memory, this thesis offers a compelling case study on the performative role of the museum in the construction of an official Holocaust memory within Britain and its relationship to national identity. While the Holocaust has become a 'moral touchstone' of contemporary society it seems urgent we raise questions of not only *why* we remember the Holocaust, but *what*, exactly, it is we are remembering. The oft cited dictum to 'never forget' requires remembrance of the Holocaust to serve a purpose; so that events of Nazi Europe may never be repeated. This ambition has proven hollow, yet countries invest millions of pounds in official Holocaust remembrance, commemoration and education. What purpose does the Holocaust serve in twenty-first century Britain? Questions of Holocaust narrative, material culture and testimony dominate the study, underpinned through wider concepts of history, memory, identity and museology in a British context. Using the Imperial War Museum as a case study, this thesis presents a challenge to the place of the Holocaust within British memory of war and questions how this limiting framework affects the way the Holocaust is remembered and understood throughout British society more broadly. Each chapter focuses on a specific aspect of the Holocaust exhibition and its display. A history of the exhibition provides detail on how and why the Holocaust became a central theme for the Imperial War Museum, while a study of the photographic, object and testimony displays in each dedicated chapter draws conclusions on how the Holocaust is shaped within this specific context. The relationship between the exhibition displays and Holocaust education more broadly throughout Britain is explored in detail in the final chapter of the thesis. Beyond the Imperial War Museum, this study points towards the future of Holocaust memory in Britain with an aim to highlight a limited understanding of the wider context of Britain and the Holocaust within popular narratives. How Britain connects to Holocaust history and memory remains central to this research, but it also considers how Britain could connect in more meaningful ways beyond learning the 'lessons' of the Holocaust.

## **Contents**

<b><u>List of Illustrations</u></b> .....	5
<b><u>Abbreviations</u></b> .....	6
<b><u>Introduction</u></b> Narrative, Object, Witness: Constructing Memory and Identity in the National Museum.....	7
<b><u>Chapter One</u></b> Establishing a Permanent National Holocaust Museum in Britain.....	38
<b><u>Chapter Two</u></b> The Holocaust in Pictures: Photographs, Narrative, Memory and Identity in the Museum.....	60
<b><u>Chapter Three</u></b> The Holocaust Through Objects: Narrative, Biography and Memory in the Museum.....	91
<b><u>Chapter Four</u></b> Holocaust Survivor Testimonies: Narrative, Memory and Identity in the Museum.....	121
<b><u>Chapter Five</u></b> Holocaust Education in the Museum: 'Promoting mutual understanding in a multicultural society'.....	141
<b><u>Conclusion</u></b> Memory of the Holocaust in Twenty-First Century Britain: Today and Beyond.....	167
<b><u>Post Script</u></b> The Government's Holocaust Commission and the Future of Holocaust Memory in Britain.....	173
<b><u>Interviews and Personal Communication</u></b> .....	176
<b><u>Bibliography</u></b> .....	177

### **List of Illustrations**

1. Floor map of the Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition
2. Entrance cone to the Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition
3. Jewish woman on the streets of Lvov
4. Discovery of the camps
5. Dissection table at the Imperial War Museum

## **Abbreviations**

IWM	Imperial War Museum (where reference is made to the IWM it always refers to IWM London unless otherwise stated)
IWMHE	Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition
USHMM	United States Holocaust Memorial Museum
BoD	Board of Deputies of British Jews
HEPO	Holocaust Exhibition Project Office
DP	Displaced persons

## *Introduction*

### **Narrative, Object, Witness: Constructing Memory and Identity in the National Museum**

On June 7, 2000, the Holocaust became an official part of British history and memory with the opening of a permanent Holocaust exhibition within London's Imperial War Museum (hereafter IWM). This, according to Holocaust exhibition project director, Suzanne Bardgett, was to be the IWM's principal contribution to the commemorative events marking the millennium in Britain, recording the Nazi persecution of the Jews of occupied Europe whilst fulfilling an important educational role.<sup>1</sup> The display begins at the closing of the First World War, detailing the rise of Hitler; Nazi racial theories and the euthanasia programme; the outbreak of the Second World War; the establishment of the ghettos; the activities of the Einsatzgruppen; the concentration camp system and the death camps of occupied Poland; the reaction of the outside world to news of the extermination policies; resistance and underground activity; the discovery of the conditions inside the camps in 1945; and the bringing to justice of Nazi war criminals [see illustration 1]. The Holocaust exhibition is concluded through the words of survivors, shown as video testimony, reflecting on the impact of the Holocaust on their post-war lives in Britain. The testimonies recorded and then edited for use within the Holocaust exhibition reflect the experiences of witnesses (in this case, exclusively survivors) who chose Britain as their post-war home. Thus, it is argued, both their recalled experiences and the way these are framed within a national museum are the result of the specifically British, or local, context; shaped by Holocaust discourse anchored in time and place. Situated at the intersections between studies of memory, identity, and museology, this thesis highlights the role of the national museum in shaping a collective memory of the Holocaust in Britain and the role of memory and the museum in shaping and reaffirming national identity.

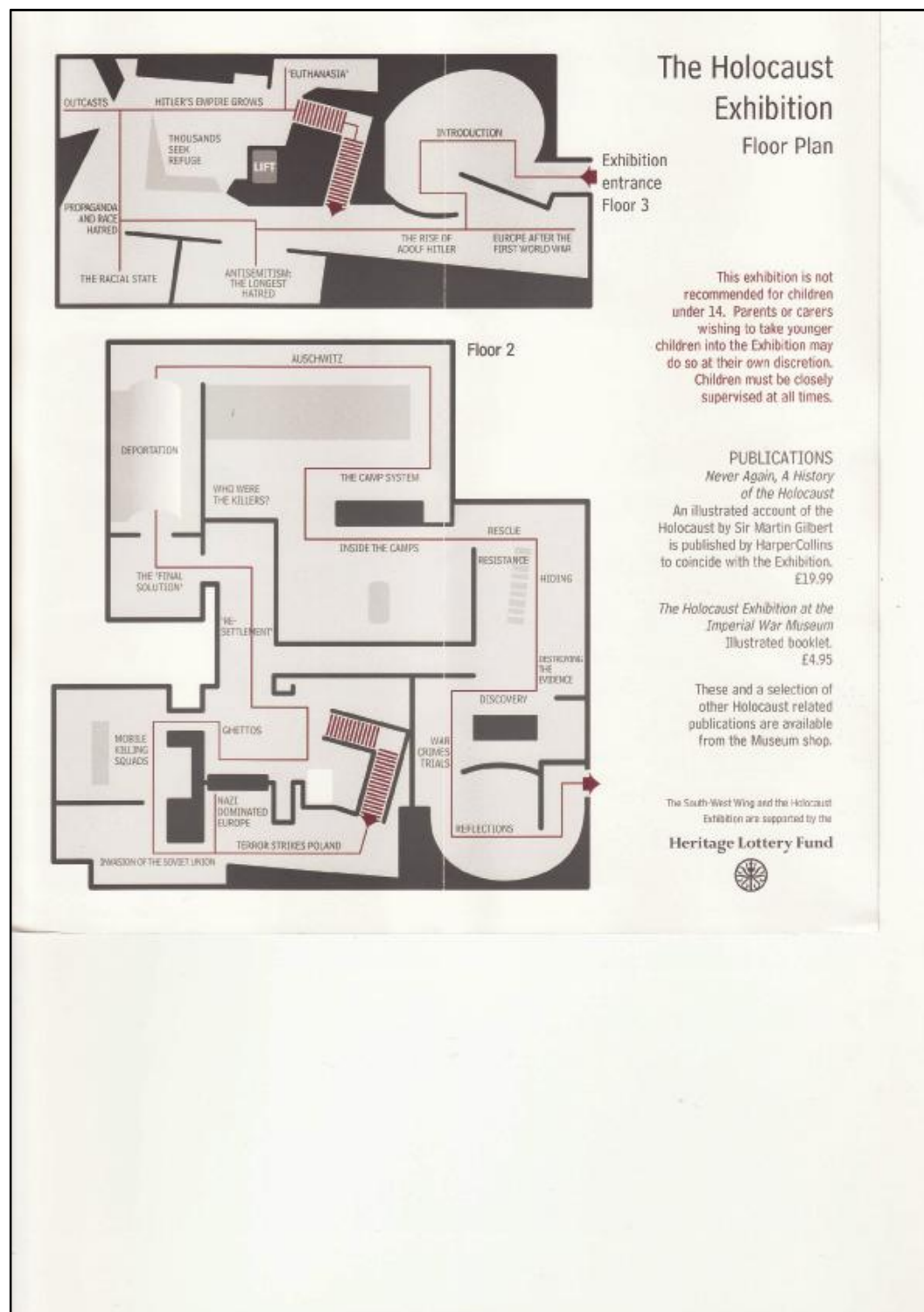
The curators, designers, advisory bodies and trustees of the IWM Holocaust Exhibition (hereafter IWMHE) each held a different set of priorities for the final exhibition, but all were clear this would be Britain's largest and most important exhibition documenting the

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<sup>1</sup> Suzanne Bardgett, "Holocaust Exhibition," *Report: Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition* (Winter 1996/1997): 1.



Illustration One: Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition Floor Plan, *image courtesy of IWM*



Nazi assault on the Jews of Europe. The IWMHE directed its focus on the Nazi treatment of Jews, with brief reference to other victim groups throughout the displays. A Jehovah's Witness contributes towards one of 16 video testimonies within the exhibition, Roma and Sinti are discussed briefly within the section on 'race science', disabled victims are represented most prominently in the 'euthanasia' section, prisoners of war are mentioned within the camps section of the exhibition, with other groups (including those mentioned) listed and detailed on interactive screens towards the end).

IWMHE designer, Stephen Greenberg claimed it would be

the most important [exhibition] the Imperial War Museum [would] undertake and perhaps the toughest; not least because of the Holocaust's place within the narrative of twentieth century conflict, and because the Museum has to position its representation within the context of multi-racial Britain.[...] The Imperial War Museum is uniquely placed to present the Holocaust as a Jewish story with universal significance. Both the British context and the context within this Museum rather than a memorial cannot be overemphasized. They must be handled deftly and tactfully. It is important to identify *how* the Holocaust happened, *what* the event signifies, and *why* it is important that it is a part of the IWM.<sup>2</sup>

Then director general of the IWM, Robert Crawford, stated the museum's primary role was 'to tell the what and the why.' He emphasised the 'importance of personal experience which had long been at the centre of the museum's way of portraying the past.'<sup>3</sup> Historical advisor to the Holocaust exhibition project, David Cesarani had wanted the exhibition to reflect the evolving scholarship on the subject of the Holocaust,<sup>4</sup> suggesting an openness that would allow for the development of Holocaust history and memory within the museum. Rejecting a conclusive approach in favour of recognising the Holocaust can never be represented (or indeed understood) in its entirety would allow visitors to engage in a dialogue with shifting Holocaust history, memory and representation. The alternative, the presentation of an authoritative past packaged within a narrative structure presenting a clear beginning, middle and end, presents the past as static, anchored in time and place, with meanings clearly fixed. Cesarani's ambition to reflect the ongoing development of Holocaust scholarship in public discourse was never fully realised through the IWMHE. Rather, the exhibition took a closed approach in an attempt to iron-out complexity, which ultimately stifles any challenge to the interpretation (it does, in fact, mask the idea of

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<sup>2</sup> DEGW Holocaust Exhibition second design submission, undated, Exhibition Design File, Holocaust Exhibition Archive, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>3</sup> Minutes of the first meeting of the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition Advisory Group, 15 April, 1996, Exhibition Design File, Holocaust Exhibition Archive, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>4</sup> Minutes of the first meeting of the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition Advisory Group.

historical interpretation altogether to present something seemingly more 'authentic'). There is little room for unease on the part of the visitor if one feels able to answer such questions as why the Holocaust happened after a visit to the Holocaust exhibition. With the Holocaust clearly defined and narrated through the exhibition, questions can be asked and, importantly, answers are provided, leaving visitors with a sense of clarity on history and its place in British memory today. Visitors, generally, do not leave the exhibition confused or disorientated, nor perhaps should they. However, this sends a message that the Holocaust is explainable (and comprehensible) through the master narrative of the exhibition; designed for the visitor to digest during a recommended two-hour visit. Visitors – a large proportion of which are school children – leave the exhibition with a seemingly comprehensive, authoritative history of the Holocaust. Elements of the past that appear to blur boundaries and distinctions within a prescribed Holocaust narrative are removed leaving a clear and unproblematic version of events. A specific version of the past is championed over others and this thesis explores the dynamics of history, narrative and memory as they play out within the IWMHE. Arguably the IWM is uniquely placed to present the Holocaust, however this context demands further enquiry and further understanding of how the context shapes Holocaust discourse in Britain (and, in turn, how Holocaust discourse shapes the context). This thesis questions how the Holocaust is presented in Britain through this important institution and its relationship to wider debates on the construction of public memory and national identity. The research contributes towards a discussion on Britain's relationship to the Holocaust and Holocaust memory, which is timely given current government plans to invest £100,000,000 in a national Holocaust memorial and learning centre focusing on Britain and the Holocaust as a reflection of British values. Given this, it seems pertinent to question what of Britain, or Britishness, we see reflected in Holocaust history and memory as it is presented through a national museum display.

### Memory and the Museum

The study of memory in its various forms and approaches has become ubiquitous within historical enquiry, particularly in studies of the Holocaust. Alon Confino has argued, however, the notion of memory is often more practiced than theorised. The term, he claims, 'has been used to denote very different things, which nonetheless share a topical common denominator: the ways in which people construct a sense of the past.' Confino goes further to state the concept of memory is used to explore, firstly, the memory of

those who have experienced an event – such as the memory of Holocaust survivors – and, secondly, 'the representation of the past and the making of it into a shared cultural knowledge by successive generations in "vehicles of memory" such as books, films, museum, commemorations, and others.'<sup>5</sup> The latter notion of memory encompasses the idea of a 'collective memory,' as may be expressed through the museum. To add a further layer of complexity, the interaction between personal and public memories as they are incorporated within a national Holocaust exhibition requires acknowledgement, where events exist within living (personal) memory. Memory is negotiated between private and public spaces.

All studies of collective memory begin with Maurice Halbwachs,<sup>6</sup> a French sociologist who was among the first to use the concept of memory in relation to a collective. As Jan Assmann has highlighted, it was Halbwachs who first demonstrated that our memory depends on socialisation and communication and that this could be analysed as a function of our social life.<sup>7</sup> But while Halbwachs paved the way for an understanding of societal memory, his theories are limited in their application to the memory of a nation as it is imagined and performed through the museum. Halbwachs focused attention on the impact of social groups on individual memory where this study aims to explore Halbwachs theory of collective memory as it has developed through the work of scholars such as, Paul Connerton and Jan and Aleida Assmann, and as it may be applied to concepts of official, public or national memory.

The central thesis of Paul Connerton's *How Societies Remember* (1989) is how the memory of a group – such as the nation – is conveyed and sustained. He argues that if there is such a thing as social memory then we are likely to find it in commemorative ceremonies.<sup>8</sup> Arguably, this may be extended to include museum displays, where Silke Arnold-de Simine argues the rituals of remembrance and commemoration are performed in public.<sup>9</sup> Patricia Davison states how the museum exists as an institution in which nations represent

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<sup>5</sup> Alon Confino, "Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of method," *The American Historical Review* 102, no 5 (Dec 1997): 1386.

<sup>6</sup> See Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (London: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>7</sup> Jan Assmann, "Communicative and Cultural Memory," in *Cultural Memory Studies: An international and interdisciplinary handbook*, ed. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Walter de Gruyter: Berlin, 2008), 109.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 4-5.

<sup>9</sup> Silke Arnold-de Simine, *Mediating Memory in the Museum: Trauma, Empathy, Nostalgia* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 11.

themselves to themselves, as well as to others. Such heritage resources, she claims, can be used to shape collective memory into official versions of the past. Museums, she claims,

like memory, mediate the past, present and future. But unlike personal memory, which is animated by an individual's lived experience, museums give material form to authorized versions of the past, which in time become institutionalized as public memory. In this way, museums anchor official memory.<sup>10</sup>

This official memory is selective; revealing as much through what is forgotten (or displaced, either temporarily or permanently) as through what is officially remembered. Within the museum, memory is intrinsically linked to material culture as the construction of official memory involves choices that determine what is collected and preserved, or what is rejected (and eventually lost from official memory). This process is cyclical as collected material embodies an official memory while this official memory also determines what material will be collected.

In her comparative study of Holocaust commemorations in France and Italy, Rebecca Clifford rejects the use of terms such as cultural memory, official memory, or national memory, suggesting that the (over)use of the term memory is misleading as those officially constructed images, symbols and narratives of the past are far removed from lived experience (thus, arguably, from memory). Rather, Clifford prefers the term 'cultural representations' or 'official interpretations' when discussing the processes of official commemoration – although she does accept there exists a relationship between memory in the lived sense and the representations of it appearing within the official arena.<sup>11</sup>

Memory may refer to the remembered experiences of the individual, survivors of the Holocaust for example, or it may refer to the memory of a group in the collective sense; based not on lived experience but shared knowledge of a subject. Jan Assman has argued that Halbwachs' theories on collective memory fall short of explaining the phenomenon of memory within an institutional context, Jan Assmann argues that Halbwachs 'was careful to keep his concept of collective memory apart from the realm of traditions, transmissions, and transferences which we propose to subsume under the term "cultural memory."<sup>12</sup> Preserving Halbwachs' distinction, Jan Assmann developed a concept of memory to include the cultural sphere, categorising it as entirely separate to collective; stating these are two

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<sup>10</sup> Patricia Davison, "Museums and the Re-Shaping of Memory," in *Heritage, Museums and Galleries: An Introductory Reader*, ed. Gerard Corsane (Oxon: Routledge, 2005), 186.

<sup>11</sup> Rebecca Clifford, *Commemorating the Holocaust: The Dilemmas of Remembrance in France and Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 21.

<sup>12</sup> Assmann, "Communicative and Cultural Memory," 110.

entirely different ways of remembering. To distinguish between the two, Jan Assmann renamed collective memory 'communicative memory,' this being memory that is non-institutional. 'Communicative memory,' is not, according to Jan Assmann,

supported by any institutions of learning, transmission, and interpretation, it is not cultivated by specialists and is not summoned or celebrated on special occasions; it is not formalized and stabilized by any forms of material symbolization; it lives in everyday interaction and communication and, for this very reason, has only limited time depth which normally reaches no farther back than eighty years, the time span of three interacting generations.<sup>13</sup>

This, Jan Assman claims, was what Halbwachs understood by 'collective memory.' Of course, as Aleida Assmann demonstrates, institutions and groups do not possess a memory like individuals, there is 'no equivalent to the neurological system or the anthropological disposition.' Aleida Assmann goes further to argue that where institutions and larger social groups (such as nations, communities, the church,) do not *have* a memory they *make* one with the aid of symbols, texts, images, rites, ceremonies, places and monuments. 'Together with such a memory, these groups and institutions "construct" an identity.' Such a memory, Aleida Assman argues, 'is based on selection and exclusion, neatly separating useful, and relevant from irrelevant memories.'<sup>14</sup> This memory is necessarily mediated and is especially discernable within the national museum. Both Jan and Aleida Assmann discuss this memory as 'cultural' and complicate it theoretically by introducing a third structural element, as opposed to the dual structure of remembering and forgetting. This third element is a combination of remembering and forgetting, which incorporates the storage function of the museum and archive. These caches of information, Aleida Assmann argues, are 'neither actively remembered nor totally forgotten, because they remain materially accessible for possible use.' Within 'cultural memory,' Aleida Assmann argues, active memory is set against the background of an archival memory. Active memory refers to what society consciously selects and maintains as salient and vital for common orientation and shared remembering. The content of active cultural memory is preserved by specific practices and institutions against the dominant tendency of decay and general oblivion.<sup>15</sup>

What is displayed publicly within the museum is considered a part of active memory, set against the accessible, yet hidden, archival memory. Archival memory is accessible largely

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<sup>13</sup> Assmann, "Communicative and Cultural Memory," 111.

<sup>14</sup> Aleida Assmann, "Memory, Individual and Collective" in *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis*, ed. Robert E. Goodin and Charles Tilly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 216.

<sup>15</sup> Assmann, "Memory, Individual and Collective," 220-221.

only to specialists and therefore remains separated from the active element of 'cultural memory.'

As Halbwachs faced sceptics when he first championed a term for memory based on social groupings, there are those who still believe it to be misleading today. Susan Sontag has argued that, 'strictly speaking, there is no such thing as collective memory.'<sup>16</sup> She claims all memory is individual, dying with each person. 'What is called collective memory is not a remembering but a stipulating: that *this* is important, and this is the story about how it happened, with the pictures that lock the story in our minds.'<sup>17</sup> Sontag takes issue not with the concept of 'collective memory' but with its defining term 'memory.' She claims it is called remembering when, in fact, it is much more than this. Perhaps this is where Jan and Aleida Assmann's divisions of the notion of collective memory become pertinent as they recognise 'remembering' collectively as far more than *just* remembering. It is a purposeful act, actively constructed; active memory. Despite her protests, Sontag applies a notion of memory to the museum when she argues,

The memory museum in its current proliferation is a product of a way of thinking about, and mourning, the destruction of European Jewry in the 1930s and 1940s. Which came to institutional fruition in Yad Vashem in Jerusalem, the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC, and the Jewish Museum in Berlin. Photographs and other memorabilia of the Shoah have been committed to a perpetual recirculation, to ensure that what they show will be remembered. Photographs of the suffering and martyrdom of a people are more than reminders of death, of failure, of victimization. They invoke the miracle of survival. To aim at the perpetuation of memory means, inevitably, that one has undertaken the task of continually renewing, of creating, memories - aided, above all, by the impress of iconic photographs. People want to be able to visit – and refresh – their memories. Now many victim peoples want a memory museum, a temple that houses a comprehensive, chronologically organized, illustrated narrative of their sufferings.<sup>18</sup>

In referring to the Holocaust memory museum landscape of the United States, Sontag claims these museums are about what did not happen in America, 'so the memory-work doesn't risk arousing an embittered domestic population against authority.'<sup>19</sup> Does this suggest museums of the Holocaust in America, or Britain, actively displace memory, limiting memory-work that takes into consideration the wider context? How, for example, does memory of a former psychiatric hospital (infamous for its mistreatment of patients) interact with the permanent Holocaust exhibition now on its premises? Perhaps it does not

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<sup>17</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin, 2003), 76-77.

<sup>18</sup> Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 77-78.

<sup>19</sup> Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 78-79.

interact at all, perhaps memory is erased as another engages, or perhaps memory is overwritten leaving behind a trace of its former life; existing as a palimpsest.

Susan Stabile uses the term palimpsest as a metaphor for memory. On the one hand, she claims,

An earlier inscription is erased and forgotten. Lived experience becomes a memory (*deposition*); and that memory is recollected through narrative (*reposition*). But memory changes with each iteration, shaped by the moment in which it is recalled. That recollection will be overwritten at a future moment, shadowed by a new memory. The past, therefore, persists only as a synecdoche, a piece of something larger – a shadow, a feeling, a fragment, a remnant, a relic, a ruin. On the other hand, a figure's trace might survive in what contemporary archaeologists call a 'cumulative palimpsest': 'the successive episodes of deposition, or layers of activity, remain superimposed one upon the other without loss of evidence, but are so re-worked and mixed together that it is difficult or impossible to separate them out into their original constituents.'<sup>20</sup>

Stabile claims material culture can be understood as palimpsestic; referring to the literal things that people leave behind. 'It sustains the marks of how people lived in and perceived the world and how we situate ourselves in reference to the past through them. In short, material culture embodies memory.'<sup>21</sup> A palimpsestuous approach to memory in the museum allows for the interaction between pasts and present in relation to object, time and space. This approach is particularly fruitful when considering the use of objects within museum displays.

When discussing memory of the Holocaust within a national context, active cultural memory becomes the official memory of the nation; in this case, British Holocaust memory. Is it possible, however, to identify an official memory of the Holocaust within Britain as isolated from the rest of the world? Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider believe the conventional concept of collective memory is firmly embedded within the 'Container of the Nation State.' This container, they claim, is in the process of slowly cracking.<sup>22</sup> Here Levy and Sznaider discuss the existence of a new form of cosmopolitan memory, that is, memory transcending ethnic and national boundaries. This shared memory of the Holocaust is instructive in understanding the relationship between what Jan Assmann identified as communicative memory (based on lived experience) and cultural memory (institutionally

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<sup>20</sup> Susan M. Stabile, "Biography of a Box: Material Culture and Palimpsest Memory," in *Memory and History: Understanding Memory as Source and Subject*, ed. Joan Tumblety (London: Routledge, 2013), 194-195.

<sup>21</sup> Stabile, "Biography of a Box," 197.

<sup>22</sup> Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, "Memory Unbound: The Holocaust and the Formation of Cosmopolitan Memory," *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, no. 1 (2002): 88



shaped and sustained memory) as it considers influences beyond immediate national boundaries. Levy and Sznajder argue that the Holocaust has become 'a moral certainty that now stretches across national borders and unites Europe and other parts of the world.' They do, however, recognise the central meaning of the Holocaust is different in each country. With this, a global collective memory of the Holocaust exists based on cosmopolitan memory, 'one that does not replace national collective memories but exists as their horizon.'<sup>23</sup> This theory sees local, or national, Holocaust memories engaging with global, resulting in a 'glocalisation' of memory. Andy Pearce argues, however, there is less evidence of a 'glocalisation' of the Holocaust in the United Kingdom than there is of Britain having an established reputation for being the 'absent local.' That is, the history of the Holocaust is considered relevant, but is equally kept at a distance with a restricted engagement with the local (a highly selective engagement). He argues that while there is much in the Holocaust exhibition that is in keeping with the notion of a globalised 'Holocaust museum concept', there are also 'significant deviations and departures'. Pearce goes further to state,

Far from representing a passive process of 'internal globalization' leading to a 'cosmopolitan' memory of the Nazi genocide, the example of the Holocaust Exhibition indicates that ingrained and established domestic approaches and tendencies have exerted at least as much if not more influence than is allowed for in the conception of "glocalization". That this may be so might well have something to do with the distinct geographical position of Britain, together with its remote experience of the Holocaust's historical events and its post-war preoccupations and concerns.<sup>24</sup>

Holocaust memory in Britain relies heavily on a firmly established memory of the Second World War, within which the image of Britain alone is prevalent. This fused relationship hinders any opportunities for Holocaust memory to become beneficially cosmopolitanised. Rather than interacting with transnational Holocaust narratives and memories, memory of the Holocaust in Britain has become another way of asserting superiority (in terms of physical and moral strength). This is of particular concern when discussing the Holocaust as representative of British values; the memory becomes divisive rather than inclusive, which, as we shall see, is problematic when discussing the use of the Holocaust in education.

This study investigates memory as it is presented within Britain's national Holocaust exhibition, how certain memories are heard (or made to be heard) as they are embedded

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<sup>23</sup> Levy and Sznajder, "Memory Unbound," 93.

<sup>24</sup> Andy Pearce, *The 'Holocaust Museum Concept' and the IWM Holocaust Exhibition: Transnational 'Glocalization' or a 'Peculiarly British Story'?* (unpublished manuscript), 15-16.

within the narrative. Annette Kuhn believes it is 'impossible to overstate the significance of narrative in cultural memory', not only the contents of stories but also the recounting of memory-stories; the performances of memory.<sup>25</sup> The museum, therefore, may be referred to as a 'vehicle of memory'.<sup>26</sup> This thesis explores the interaction of memories, from the lived experiences of Holocaust witnesses and how these are framed, to the institutional construction of an official memory in the form of active cultural memory. It employs the term memory in a broad sense to encompass both lived memory and memory constructed with a purpose, such as that embodied through museums and exhibitions.

### Museology and The National Museum Setting

Museology or, more precisely, new museology has been defined by Peter Vergo as the study of museums, their history and underlying philosophy.<sup>27</sup> Museums, he argues, not only see their function in the display of 'treasures' but are actively engaged in mass education, balancing this with commercial viability. Further than this, Vergo identifies the political, ideological and aesthetic dimension of the museum. He questions to what criteria works of art, objects and historical materials are judged to be beautiful or even historically significant.

What makes certain objects, rather than others, 'worth' preserving for posterity? [...] In the acquisition of material, of whatever kind, let alone in putting that material on public display or making it publicly accessible, museums make certain choices determined by judgements as to value, significance or monetary worth, judgements which may derive in part from the system of values peculiar to the institution itself, but which in a more profound sense are also rooted in our education, our upbringing, our prejudices. Whether we like it or not, every acquisition (and indeed disposal), every juxtaposition or arrangement of an object or work of art, together with other objects or works of art, within the context of a temporary exhibition or museum display means placing a certain construction upon history, be it the history of the distant or more recent past, of our own culture or someone else's, of mankind in general or a particular aspect of human endeavour. Beyond the captions, the information panels, the accompanying catalogue, the press handout, there is a subtext comprising innumerable diverse, often contradictory strands, woven from the wishes and ambitions, the intellectual or political or social or educational aspirations and preconceptions of the museum director, the curator, the scholar, the designer, the sponsor – to say nothing of the

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<sup>25</sup> Annette Kuhn, "Memory Texts and Memory Work: Performances of Memory In and With Visual Media," *Memory Studies* 3, no. 4 (2010): 298

<sup>26</sup> 'Vehicles of memory' have been discussed by scholars of memory such as Alon Confino, however the term originates with Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi in, *Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (New York: Schocken, 1989).

<sup>27</sup> Peter Vergo, "Introduction," in *The New Museology*, ed. Peter Vergo (London: Reaktion, 1989), 1.

society, the political or social or educational system which nurtured all these people and in so doing left its stamp upon them.<sup>28</sup>

Here the very purpose of the museum is questioned. Vergo has identified the 'constructedness' of museum display, realising that each selection is not only the result of institutional decisions and demands but, more than this, the narrative imposed along with supporting acquisitions are dependent (and reliant) upon the society within which they are expressed. Indeed, as Sheila Watson argues, it is accepted that 'museums mirror the beliefs of the society in which they have developed as well as influencing that society's view of itself.'<sup>29</sup> This argument supports a claim that the IWMHE has evolved through conditions specific to a British Holocaust culture. That is, a version (or versions) of the Holocaust past championed within British society, shaped by British values and concerns, wholly relevant to a British audience and expressed within a national museum setting; an institution in which ideas (or myths) of nation, nationality and national identity are represented or performed. This is not to undermine the influence of a global Holocaust culture on this specifically British version, but to acknowledge the conditions specific to the locale in an effort to better understand local and global memory practices.

Questions have been asked of why Britain for a permanent display of the Nazi past, and why in 2000? The National Holocaust Centre and Museum (formerly Beth Shalom), a Holocaust centre set up by a Christian family in Nottingham, has been dedicated to commemorating the victims of the Holocaust since 1995 in the hope of creating 'a world wherein the chance of the repetition of such inhumanity is greatly reduced.'<sup>30</sup> Jewish museums in both London and Manchester document the local history of Jews and the impact of the Holocaust as well as the Wiener Library's collection of material relating to the Holocaust and its legacies. How would the IWM's proposed plans for a permanent exhibition detailing the Holocaust compare with this? Why was it believed that an exhibition of this subject on a national scale was required? A number of aims and intentions for a grand-scale national exhibition within the country's capital were discussed by various trustees, grassroots organisations, advisory bodies, designers and curators, which shall be discussed further in Chapter One. The important educational role of the exhibition, where the IWMHE could act as a central artery for transmitting the facts about

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<sup>28</sup> Vergo, "Introduction," 2-3.

<sup>29</sup> Sheila Watson, "Museums and Their Communities" in *Museums and Their Communities*, ed. Sheila Watson (London: Routledge, 2007), 12.

<sup>30</sup> Stephen Smith, *Making Memory: Creating Britain's First Holocaust Centre* (Nottingham: Quill Press, 1999), 2.

the Holocaust to future generations,<sup>31</sup> is highlighted. While much energy is devoted to recognising the importance of the Holocaust's inclusion within a national museum in Britain, and for its inclusion on the National Curriculum for schools in England and Wales, perhaps less thought is afforded to understanding of how meanings are shaped, disseminated and verified through these official channels.

It has been assumed that we learn things from museums,<sup>32</sup> but what do we learn? Within narrative museums, meaning is generated through objects only as they support the overarching historical narrative. Simon Knell has argued the interpretable object in such museums has disappeared completely or 'moved to a supporting role to be replaced by mere assertion.' In this sense, the museum has become a stage upon which a performance of the past is enacted. The performance within the museum, as opposed to the theatre, 'purports to be a representation of reality and truth, but the privileging of narrative and scenography over the [multiple] interpretation[s] of objects seems to shift the museum away from those technologies which permit the museum to claim moral authority' or, at least, an authority based on authenticity. Knell argues,

Non-fictional narrative has its basis in historical writing, not in museum building. It entered the museum, rather late in the day, in the possession of historians, whose field of study has a disdain for objects as historical evidence, and designers, possessing storyboards and interested in the logic of visitor flow.<sup>33</sup>

The material objects preserved and displayed (or stored) by the museum become subordinated to historical narrative; the tool of the historian. Arguably, then, what is most important to the museum is not the artefact itself, but its ability to support the narrative. The danger here is the same objects are sought through each Holocaust museum to illustrate an accepted (and expected) version of the past at the expense of objects that possess the ability to advance understanding on the subject and to question accepted truths – to educate rather than verify. But who or what shapes this narrative if it is not the tangible remnants of the past themselves? IWMHE project director, Suzanne Bardgett stated how clues 'as to the kinds of artefacts we might acquire could be found in existing

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<sup>31</sup> David Cesarani, cited in Hannah Holtschneider, "Victims, Perpetrators, Bystanders? Witnessing, remembering and the ethics of representation in museums of the Holocaust," *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History* 13, no. 1 (Summer 2007): 86.

<sup>32</sup> Ludmilla Jordanova, "Objects of Knowledge: A historical perspective on museums" in *The New Museology*, ed. Peter Vergo (London: Reaktion, 1989), 22.

<sup>33</sup> Simon J. Knell, "National Museums and the National Imagination," in *National Museums: New studies from around the world*, ed. Simon J. Knell, Peter Aronsson, Arne Bugge Amundsen, Amy Jane Barnes, Stuart Burch, Jennifer Carter, Viviane Gosselin, Sarah A. Hughes and Alan Kirwan (Oxon: Routledge, 2011), 7.

exhibitions.<sup>34</sup> Holocaust museums become repetitive and predictable, and the replication of displays reinforces a belief that the narrative emerges naturally from the objects (while in reality the construction of the narrative has very little to do with the objects themselves). Little consideration is given to the objects that do not make the final exhibition; objects that would perhaps compromise or challenge the overarching historical narrative, or those not easily identifiable as belonging to the Holocaust period as defined by the IWMHE. An unfortunate consequence of obscurity in this context is those objects not easily identifiable as classic Holocaust tropes become lost to memory through decay, while recognisable or familiar objects benefit from long-term preservation. In future years only those objects supporting this rigid narrative will remain. As such, it seems urgent that an understanding is developed of how objects of the Holocaust are used, and how they are defined. Ultimately, the historical agency of objects is lost through an emphasis on 'getting the story right' (a familiar narrative of the Holocaust rather than of the individual artefacts) and through making the exhibition design work in practical terms. The intricate histories of the material features surprisingly low on the list of priorities for the IWMHE. The history of an individual artefact became less important than how the item would fit into the exhibition in practical terms and to how it could convey a story in support of the prescribed narrative. First, items would be chosen for their ability to tell an already established story and, secondly, it would be checked that such an item could be accommodated within the exhibition's design. This leaves little room for visitors to consider how objects may signify alternative 'truths' in a challenge to a linear historical narrative. The meanings of any one object are diverse and multilayered – and this is problematic for the approach adopted by the IWMHE. As the IWMHE have opted to narrate an authoritative history of the Holocaust, to allow multiple meanings on each object would cause conflict ultimately damaging the authority of the display. Arguably, however, an approach that encourages questions to be asked of each object brings the visitor closer to an understanding than a restrictive presentation of 'facts.' Representing the complexities of the Holocaust – understanding it as a constant struggle over history and memory – seems far more authentic than to claim any representation can truly show things 'as they were.' Visitors leave the museum with a sense of the past as clearly defined with the narrative springing naturally from the objects displayed. As this thesis demonstrates, however, the narrative of the Holocaust presented within the IWMHE is far from natural. It is purposefully shaped and reflects compromise on

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<sup>34</sup> Suzanne Bardgett, "The Material Culture of Persecution: Collecting for the Holocaust Exhibition at the Imperial War Museum," in *Extreme Collecting: Challenging practices for 21<sup>st</sup> century museums*, ed. Graeme Were and J.C.H King (Oxford: Berghahn, 2012), 23.

many levels. There were many disagreements between designers, advisory bodies and trustees within the IWMHE, all giving prominence to different aspects of the design (discussed in greater detail in Chapter One). Using artefactual evidence, the IWMHE constructs an unquestionable version of the Holocaust that is legitimated through display. The narrative legitimises the objects while the objects reaffirm the narrative.

Knell discusses the museum as an artistic medium,<sup>35</sup> which is insightful for our understanding of the process of material selection. The museum presents a performance of the past, making the visitor believe in an imagined reality through the use of 'authentic' relics. This reality, however, is a construct; multiple realities may be found within the objects themselves but it is the performance of the museum – the story (including narrative, lighting, set, the *mise-en-scène* in which objects of the past become props) – that determines how such objects are experienced and remembered. Within the IWMHE the project team began with what they described as a 'popular' Holocaust narrative, which, once established, could be used to seek relevant objects. It is important to highlight the order in which these tasks took place as the narrative was not constructed around surviving material remains of the Holocaust (as happens in many traditional museums). The meanings of objects were determined by an externally imposed narrative rather than through the discovery of a 'life' of the object itself (this will be discussed further in Chapter Three). Arguably, then, the authenticity upon which the museum relies for its claim to historical truth is grounded in a narrative that can be viewed as partially fictional; fictional in the sense that narratives necessarily construct coherent frameworks, ways of understanding the world, that do not exist in nature.

But if museums are poetic and political spaces, rather than purveyors of objectively conceived Enlightenment truths, then all they can perform are acts of cultural symbolism. With this admittedly cynical lens in view, we might imagine national museums as providing the scenography and stage for the performance of myths of nationhood. As in the theatre we might imagine and believe, but in the museum our imagining can be so much more believable because we are led to think that all around us has arrived objectively and all is as it seems to be; these things are not merely props.<sup>36</sup>

The museum representation, Knell argues, despite pertaining to the real, does not come without performance. The two, museum reality and performance, can never be disassociated. 'All who enter the museum are,' Knell argues 'deceived by the illusion that

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<sup>35</sup> Knell, "National Museums and the National Imagination," 7.

<sup>36</sup> Knell, "National Museums and the National Imagination," 4.

the museum's authority rests on its objective representation of the world' but of course, it does not.<sup>37</sup>

Michael Fehr refers to museums as representation machines.<sup>38</sup> They use the material stored inside to say something of another world, but this is highly selective. James Young has argued that remnants of the past have long come to stand for the whole of events. The fragment, he suggests, 'presents itself not only as natural knowledge, but as a piece of the event itself.' With this, he continues,

we risk mistaking the piece for the whole, the implied whole for unmediated history. [...] As a result, museums, archives, and ruins may not house our memory-work so much as displace it with claims of material evidence and proof.<sup>39</sup>

A fragment becomes representative of a whole and, through the authenticity of the fragment (its previous 'life' within another world), that whole becomes an authentic rendering of the past. Silke Arnold-de Simine has argued that many new museums are not based on collections at all but focus on 'crucial historical events which are deemed essential for interpreting the past and envisaging the future.' Simine goes further to state,

The histories of persecution, migration and violence on which they concentrate are usually object-poor because the people, whose plight is exhibited, were dispossessed and the traces of their existence have been eradicated. [...] In this context the few authentic objects on display risk acquiring the aura of icons or even relics but they also function as material anchors and as proofs of historical events.<sup>40</sup>

The tangible remains of the Holocaust past are intended to provide 'concrete' evidence in support of the IWMHE narrative; legitimising its truth claims. A marble dissection table from Kaufbeuren-Irsee Psychiatric Hospital in Germany acts as witness to the 'horrors of euthanasia' within the IWMHE. When considered within the context of the IWMHE (housed within the former psychiatric hospital of Bethlem), can its significance reach beyond marking the beginning of state-sanctioned murder in Nazi-occupied Europe? Could the treatment of psychiatric patients throughout Britain and Europe more broadly as they intersect with the events of Nazi Germany be considered here? Disregarding this context within a former psychiatric hospital in Britain limits understanding of the Holocaust as it unfolded within Nazi-occupied Europe. Furthermore, it is questionable whether a dissecting

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<sup>37</sup> Knell, "National Museums and the National Imagination," 4-5.

<sup>38</sup> Michael Fehr, "A Museum and its Memory: The art of recovering history" in *Museums and Memory*, ed. Susan Crane (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 59.

<sup>39</sup> James Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust memorials and meaning* (London: Yale University Press, 1993), 127.

<sup>40</sup> Simine, *Mediating Memory in the Museum: Trauma, Empathy, Nostalgia*, 10.

table pre-dating the First World War can act as 'concrete evidence' of murder in the lead-up to the Second World War; this conclusion relies on far more than the object alone can offer. Questions of object autonomy and the relationship with historical narrative are considered in detail throughout Chapter Three where the role of objects in historical enquiry, and how objects may be used to challenge accepted historical narratives, is discussed.

Objects that become props in the performance of the museum are used to provide evidence of a past. This role is questionable, however, when the 'reality' the object presents can only exist within a prescribed historical narrative that has very little (if any) connection to the object itself. The surviving remnant is stripped of agency and woven into a story that is constructed around Holocaust scholarship and its popular manifestations. The museum display, therefore, can be considered as 'authentic' as documentary film. Arguably the IWMHE does not present material evidence of the Holocaust but rather presents a story of the Holocaust illustrated with objects identified as significant. What is important, materially, to the story of the Holocaust told within Britain's national Holocaust exhibition? In identifying this it is also possible to trace the history of a 'popular' Holocaust narrative, to explore why it was regarded as essential to acquire a 1940s Belgian railcar (which would be subsequently dismantled); what would this example convey to visitors and how are these meanings constructed? Such questions are considered throughout the thesis, with Chapter Three focusing specifically on the material selections for display.

### Narrative and Story in the Museum

Before opening a discussion on narrative and story within the museum it is important to clarify what is meant by these terms as they are used within the context of the thesis. Donald Spence credits Freud for raising awareness of the power of a coherent narrative, 'in particular, of the way in which an aptly chosen reconstruction can fill the gap between two apparently unrelated events and, in the process, make sense out of non-sense.' The facts alone, Spence argues, 'are not sufficient; they must also be presented in a context that allows their full significance to be appreciated even by the reader who has no other information about the case.' The framing, Spence states, 'is just as important as its content.'<sup>41</sup> Facts are woven together to form cohesion. The achievement of this involves selecting and dismissing certain points as it is impossible to reconstruct every moment in

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<sup>41</sup> Donald Spence, *Narrative Truth and Historical Truth: Meaning and Interpretation in Psychoanalysis* (New York: Norton, 1982). 21-22.



time. This selection process is a result of external factors – cultural, social and political – that operate on both conscious and subconscious levels. Moments in time are plotted into a sequence, which we call the narrative, placing external values upon those moments through a process of selection that is socially constructed and culturally contingent. It does not follow that these moments must be narrated chronologically, this is only one organisational device. Moments may be narrated thematically, but there is always an assumption that one moment leads to another. There is an inevitability to narration that assumes the next moment happened because of one proceeding it. This does not exist in nature, at least not in the same way. Things may seem to happen as the result of another action, however it is only in the retelling that we make sense of isolated moments. Moments in time are ordered chronologically within the IWMHE, Suzanne Bardgett was clear there was to be no pre-empting of the story within the exhibition; material was to appear only at its appointed place,<sup>42</sup> the narrative was to guide museum visitors through from Europe after the First World War to Holocaust survivors in Britain today.

Jakob Lothe, Susan Rubin Suleiman and James Phelan argue that narrative,

whether fictional or nonfictional, whether in print, paint, or pixels, has the capacity to offer us explanations about our experiences that often elude other modes such as expository descriptions, abstract arguments, or statistical analyses. Narrative depends on both selection (any narrative implicitly says “out of all the events that happened during this period and all the people involved in those events, these are the ones that matter most”) and detailed attention to what is selected.

Narrative, they argue, combines a focus on concrete detail with an interest in the broader significance.<sup>43</sup> When concrete moments in time are isolated and woven in to a narrative they are invested with a significance; they are moments that, when brought together, have been deemed worthy of reconstruction.

H. Porter Abbott argues a distinction between narrative and story claiming that we pick up the story through narrative discourse. 'The story', he states,

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<sup>42</sup> Suzanne Bardgett, "The Material Culture of Persecution: Collecting for the Holocaust Exhibition at the Imperial War Museum," in *Extreme Collecting: Challenging practices or 21<sup>st</sup> century museums*, ed. Graeme Were and J.C.H. King (Oxford: Berghahn, 2012), 23.

<sup>43</sup> Jakob Lothe, Susan Rubin Suleiman and James Phelan, "After Testimony: Holocaust Representation and Narrative Theory," in *After Testimony: The Ethics and Aesthetics of Holocaust Narrative for the Future*, ed. Jakob Lothe, Susan Rubin Suleiman & James Phelan (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2012), 8.

is always mediated – by a voice, a style of writing, camera angles, actors' interpretations – so that what we call the story is really something that we construct. We put it together from what we read or see, often by inference.<sup>44</sup>

Narrative, in part, conveys story – but the story cannot be as controlled as its narrative counterpart, which is dependent upon the audience. Abbott illustrates how stories are re-presented through narrative and demonstrates how story 'is our way of organizing time according to what is important for us.'<sup>45</sup> This suggests that, regardless of the storyteller's intentions, the story is always owned individually by the audience. The storyteller controls the narrative(s), which may be shaped and moulded accordingly to tell the intended story. The same story may be identified even when differing narrative strands have been applied; the details of the story are unimportant as long as a foundational structure is in place. A master narrative may dictate how the story unfolds, but this can incorporate multiple narrative strands without compromising the integrity of the story. The IWMHE applies a foundational structure to the exhibition that consists of a number of 'hooks' in the story that will be recognisable for the visitor. Although not an exhaustive list, the most basic of these are Nazis and Jews, with visitors to the exhibition recognising the Holocaust from the protagonists of the story. Beyond the characters, visitors can expect to confront anti-Semitism, stars of David, propaganda, ghettos, trains, camps, showers, shoes, striped uniforms and liberation. Multiple narrative strands are layered upon the basic structure but, essentially, these are representative narratives; narratives used to draw generalised conclusions. The smaller narratives differ from country to country in their representations of the Holocaust, however they contribute towards telling the same story. This aptly illustrates how the details of the story are unimportant, as long as a recognisable skeleton is in place. When planning for the IWMHE was underway, Holocaust Exhibition director, Suzanne Bardgett stressed the importance of a firm storyline; drawing up a list of main topics to be covered emphasising that each one should be thought out with care.<sup>46</sup> This list of topics, providing the basic narrative structure, would dictate the artefacts sought, the narrative strands developed and the questions asked of survivors in the oral testimony element of the exhibition.

#### British National Identity and Memory of the Holocaust

According to Thomas Ricento,

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<sup>44</sup> H. Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 20.

<sup>45</sup> Abbott, *The Cambridge Introduction to Narrative*, 36.

<sup>46</sup> Suzanne Bardgett Holocaust Exhibition Philosophy

national identity is 'constructed and conveyed in discourse ... A nation is a mental construct, an imaginary complex of ideas ... this image is real to the extent that one is convinced of it, believes in it and identifies with it emotionally.' Following this same line of reasoning, Stuart Hall argues that 'People are not only legal citizens of a nation; they participate in the idea of a nation as represented in its national culture. A nation is a symbolic community.'<sup>47</sup>

Richard Weight argues that national identity 'is how people define themselves in accordance with the nation they feel they belong to, whether or not it exists territorially.'<sup>48</sup> According to Mary Fulbrook, national identity does not exist but rather is 'a human construct, evident only when sufficient people believe in some version of collective identity for it to be a social reality.'<sup>49</sup> National identity is defined comparatively, that is, through difference to other nations, therefore relying on exclusivity. This is especially problematic when discussing histories and memories of migration and diasporas, important themes in studies of the Holocaust.

In Britain, that which resembles a national identity has become increasingly linked to memory of war, and of the Second World War in particular, as a nostalgic nod to when Britain was 'unquestionably great'. As Lucy Noakes and Juliette Pattinson have identified, 'few historical events have resonated as fully in modern British culture as the Second World War.'<sup>50</sup> Memory of the Second World War in Britain represents a time of national unity, of uniting against a common threat, or common enemy, which in part explains the obsessive relationship Britain has with this period of history in popular culture and memory. Lucy Noakes has argued the popular memory of the Second World War that exists today 'is overwhelmingly a memory of national unity: a memory of a time when internal divisions were overcome in the face of an external threat.'<sup>51</sup> Mark Connelly argues memory of the Second World War plays an ongoing role in our understanding of the world around us,<sup>52</sup> and, alongside this, the year 1940 proves a defining moment in British memory as a time when Britain 'stood alone' and persevered to beat Hitler and Nazism against the odds. Malcolm Smith highlights how the visual accounts of the Second World War in popular

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<sup>47</sup> Thomas Ricento, "The Discursive Construction of Americanism," *Discourse Society* 14 (2003): 612.

<sup>48</sup> Richard Weight, *Patriots: National Identity in Britain, 1940-2000* (London: Macmillan, 2002), 17.

<sup>49</sup> Mary Fulbrook, *German National Identity After the Holocaust* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 1.

<sup>50</sup> Lucy Noakes and Juliette Pattinson, "Introduction: 'Keep Calm and Carry On' The Cultural Memory of the Second World War in Britain," in *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War*, ed. Lucy Noakes and Juliette Pattinson (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 1.

<sup>51</sup> Lucy Noakes, *War and the British: Gender and National Identity, 1939-91* (London: IB Tauris, 1998), 6.

<sup>52</sup> Mark Connelly, *We Can Take It! Britain and Memory of the Second World War* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 269.

culture carry powerful discourses on British national identity rooted in popular memory of war. These, he argues, embody

all the associations of phrases like 'finest hour', 'backs to the wall', 'community spirit', 'people's war'. The very fact that one need do no more than set these phrases down, without any need to explain them, suggests what one means by the mythic quality of 1940, and in itself testifies to the enormous success of the myth.<sup>53</sup>

Janet Watson has argued it would be difficult to overestimate the importance of the Second World War to British national identity:

As the Guardian once editorialized, 'As far as the British people are concerned the history of planet earth goes like this: 1) The Earth cools. 2) Primitive life forms emerge. 3) Britain wins the Second World War.' This idea, in fact, has had a profound influence on British views [...] The war has been key to the ways many British people have thought about their nation and themselves as its citizens. Britain, of course, is remembered as having 'stood alone' from the fall of France until the arrival of the Americans. The war seemed to represent a time when everyone got along, when the Empire was secure (and its people somewhere far away), and when Britain clearly mattered to the world. Forty years later, when it was all too obvious to most people that none of those things were true (whether or not they ever had been), looking back at this representation of the war was a way of ignoring the complexities of contemporary Britain.<sup>54</sup>

The residual effects of such representations have a direct impact on how the public engages with Holocaust history and memory. This can be witnessed within the IWMHE on the *News Reaches Britain 1* display where visitors are explicitly informed that, when France fell, Britain stood alone against Nazism. This directly, and seemingly unproblematically, links memory of the Holocaust to Britain's mythologised memory of war.

Layered upon this a cultural memory of the Holocaust has been shaped within Britain, which is entangled with cultural memory of the Second World War. As Tim Cole has convincingly argued, the Holocaust 'is integrated - ex post facto - into Britain's "finest hour"'.<sup>55</sup> As a consequence, Holocaust memory becomes intimately linked with a nostalgic and largely static popular memory of the Second World War, which inevitably shapes how the Holocaust is presented within a museum of modern war and, thus, how it can be understood. In a sense, the Holocaust acts to reinforce this cosy mythology, rather than

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<sup>53</sup> Malcolm Smith, *Britain and 1940: History, Myth and Popular Memory* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2000), 4.

<sup>54</sup> Janet Watson, "Total War and Total Anniversary: The Material Culture of Second World War Commemoration in Britain," in *British Cultural Memory and the Second World War*, eds. Lucy Noakes and Juliette Pattinson (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 175-176.

<sup>55</sup> Tim Cole, "Nativization and Nationalization: A Comparative Landscape Study of Holocaust Museums in Israel, the US and the UK," *Journal of Israeli History* 23, no. 1 (2004): 142

complicate it, clearly identifying the nature of Britain's 'enemy' against which they stood during the Second World War. As early as 1945, Britain began to present events later known as the Holocaust (such as the liberation of western camps) to the wider public as a justification for the war effort. According to Aimée Bunting, the images of liberation 'provided the British government with a clear justification for the war effort'<sup>56</sup> despite, during the war itself, the British government's avoidance in presenting an impression the war was being fought on behalf of the Jews. Tony Kushner argues there was a fear the Nazis would 'exploit such a linkage within their own propaganda, stimulate British antisemitism and thereby help to undermine morale on the "home front"'.<sup>57</sup> Kushner goes further to argue British engagement with the plight of European Jewry during the Second World War was, at best, ambivalent, and the Jewishness of victims largely censored in 1945. These are details, he claims, that are not 'comfortably digested by "heritage" - hence the success of the dominant war narrative which highlights, in sequence, Britain alone, military and civilian sacrifice, Belsen liberation and VE Day'.<sup>58</sup>

Richard Crownshaw argues that Holocaust exhibitions reflect

an idealized national identity that is the antithesis of a past, aberrant and German nationalism. These museums posit Britain and the USA as redeemed nation-states for their role in liberating western concentration camps and providing a safe haven for those who fled the Holocaust as it unfolded, and in its aftermath.<sup>59</sup>

Aimée Bunting supports this with her contention that, since 1933,

Britain has been engaged in a relationship with the destruction of European Jewry that has seen the construction, representation and memory of a version of the Holocaust that has been and continues to be filtered through the prism of the country's national identity.<sup>60</sup>

Alongside memory, this thesis addresses constructions of national identity within the museum or, more specifically, constructions and expressions of national identity within the IWMHE, situated within a building that epitomises dominance, power and control. This aims to problematise the relationship between Britain and the Holocaust as an integral part of Second World War memory. By creating this particular interpretive space for the

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<sup>56</sup> Aimée Bunting, "'My Question Applies to this Country': British Identities and the Holocaust," *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History* 14, no.1 (Summer 2008):65-66

<sup>57</sup> Tony Kushner, "From 'This Belsen Business' to 'Shoah Business': History, Memory and Heritage, 1945-2005," *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History* 12, no.1-2 (2006):191.

<sup>58</sup> Kushner, "From 'This Belsen Business' to 'Shoah Business,'" 212.

<sup>59</sup> Richard Crownshaw, "Performing Memory in Holocaust Museums," *Performance Research* 5, no. 3 (2000): 18.

<sup>60</sup> Aimée Bunting, "'My Question Applies to this Country,'" 61.

Holocaust in Britain, within a museum described as the 'official keeper of Britain's war memory',<sup>61</sup> it is argued that memory of the Holocaust is both limited and restrictive with multiple narrative strands consciously neglected (or actively rejected) as the story is told within Britain's national museum of war. As such, this confidently argues the context of Holocaust history, memory and learning is wholly relevant in understanding how the Holocaust is taught or disseminated more widely throughout Britain. Also, this context potentially limits the connections visitors to the museum make between the history presented and their own lives. Public understanding of this important and complex history is severely limited by the restrictive context within which the Holocaust is presented. With British national identity so intertwined with a dominant memory of the Second World War, this thesis questions the limitations this places on how the Holocaust is, or can be, remembered in Britain today.

Jennifer Taylor argues 'we cannot ignore questions of what we will refer to as national identity when we read Holocaust texts. People do not', she argues, 'create texts without contexts; we always have a relationship to a place, a language, to a cultural or political identity.'<sup>62</sup> Meanings are woven into the exhibition space, bound to time and place. The construction of Holocaust memory through the IWMHE illuminates complex relationships between memory, place, time and identity. The exhibition is historically and culturally anchored, revealing vital clues to how people see themselves in relation to other times and places. Identity, in this sense, is formed through inclusion in a particular culture or cultures and, consequently, exclusion from and of others. The political power of a belief in Britishness, or British values, is built upon the notion of an imagined community in which members identify themselves within national boundaries.<sup>63</sup>

Museums are national expressions of identity linked to the idea of having a shared past; what Sharon Macdonald identifies as the collective equivalent of personal memory. Macdonald highlights what is displayed in the museum does not have to be of the nation itself but acts as a performative utterance of having an identity.<sup>64</sup> Visitors, then, are expected to have a clearer idea of themselves as a part of a national community on visiting

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<sup>61</sup> Tony Kushner, "The Memory of Belsen," in *Belsen in History and Memory*, ed. Jo Reilly, David Cesarani, Tony Kushner and Colin Richmond (London: Frank Cass, 1997), 197.

<sup>62</sup> Jennifer Taylor, "Introduction," in *National Responses to the Holocaust: National Identity and Public Memory*, ed. Jennifer Taylor (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2014), 2.

<sup>63</sup> See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

<sup>64</sup> Sharon J. Macdonald, "Museums, National, Postnational and Transcultural Identities," *Museums and Society* 1, no.1 (2003): 3.

the museum, meaning the displays become as much about Britishness as they do about the Holocaust. Macdonald has argued,

Public museums [...] were from their beginning embroiled in the attempt to culture a public and encourage people to imagine and experience themselves as members of an ordered but nevertheless sentimentalized nation-state. They invited people to conceptualize a sense of national or racial difference from others; and to explore their own worlds as relatively and reassuringly governed ones. They helped to convey senses of both stability and progress. They helped to instantiate a 'scientific', 'objective' way of seeing - a gaze which could 'forget' its own positionedness. They helped to think identities as bounded and coherent.<sup>65</sup>

Fiona McLean argues that museums have come a long way from the nationalistic institutions of the 19th century. Now, she argues, narrating the nation has become far more about narrating the diversity of a nation:

In an era of multiculturalism, women's movements, movements for the recognition of homosexual men and lesbian women, respect for the environment as well as nationalist movements, coupled with large scale movements of populations across the globe for travel, commerce or migration, the identity of the nation becomes increasingly fluid and contingent.<sup>66</sup>

The complexities of representing a diverse nation to itself, however, have not gone unnoticed within the museum world. The problem of definition is raised when, to understand diversity, we must first categorise groups and individuals. Rather than narrating diversity, groups become homogenised within museum narratives for the sake of comprehension and cohesion. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter Five, with reference to diversity and Holocaust education at the IWMHE.

In defence of the national focus, while much of the material covered in this thesis transcends national boundaries - photographs, objects and survivor witnesses as well as their memories have all travelled between nations before settling in Britain - their position within a national museum demands consideration be given to how this externally imposed national structure shapes and gives meaning to the narratives, objects and witnesses displayed. Also, in turn, how the narratives, objects and witnesses give shape and meaning to the nation in which they are presented. Britain has a complex relationship to the Holocaust in history and memory, this research contributes towards an understanding of Holocaust memory in Britain as a central aspect of British identity.

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<sup>65</sup> Macdonald, "Museums, National, Postnational and Transcultural Identities," 5.

<sup>66</sup> Fiona McLean, "Guest Editorial: Museums and National Identity," *Museums and Society* 3, no.1 (March 2005): 1.

## Material Culture and Object Biography

As material culture addresses the relationship between people and things, attention is directed to how the two influence one another. Chris Gosden and Yvonne Marshall argue that one metaphor for understanding this process is biography. Within their study of the cultural biography of objects they argue the central idea of biography to be, 'as people and objects gather time, movement and change, they are constantly transformed, and these transformations of person and object are tied up with each other.'<sup>67</sup> The social interaction between people and objects creates meaning and a biographical approach to material allows for an analysis of these meanings. Objects become more than lumps of material to which things are done. They are afforded agency as equal partners in the creation of meanings when considered alongside the people and contexts by whom and within which they are used. As Gosden and Marshall have stated, 'meanings change and are renegotiated through the life of an object. [...] Meaning emerges from social action and the purpose of an artefact biography is to illuminate that process.'<sup>68</sup>

This notion of object biography as it is used here can be traced back to Igor Kopytoff in *The Cultural Biography of Things* (1986).<sup>69</sup> Here Kopytoff largely focuses on the economics of material culture and the commoditisation of objects. Grounded within an anthropological approach to biography, Kopytoff's research applies similar methods to arrive at the biographies of things:

In doing the biography of a thing, one would ask questions similar to those one asks about people: What, sociologically, are the biographical possibilities inherent in its 'status' and in the period and culture, and how are these possibilities realized? Where does the thing come from and who made it? What has been its career so far, and what do people consider to be an ideal career for such things? What are the recognized 'ages' or periods in the things 'life,' and what are the cultural markers for them? How does the thing's use change with its age, and what happens to it when it reaches the end of its usefulness?<sup>70</sup>

Kopytoff argues biographies make salient what might otherwise remain obscure. In situations of cultural contact, what is significant about the adoption of alien objects is not

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<sup>67</sup> Chris Gosden and Yvonne Marshall, "The Cultural Biography of Objects," *World Archaeology* 31, No. 2 (Oct 1999): 169.

<sup>68</sup> Gosden and Marshall, "The Cultural Biography of Objects," 170.

<sup>69</sup> This notion can be traced back further, however, for the purpose of this study it is the form of biography pioneered by Kopytoff that is of relevance.

<sup>70</sup> Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986), 66-67.



the fact that they are adopted, but the way they are culturally redefined and put to use.<sup>71</sup>

To fully determine how an object has been redefined – to understand how cultures use material objects – it is essential to understand how it has been defined in the past, and this is achieved through object biography.

Tim Dant suggests the aim of biography should be,

to recover through a reconstructive narrative, clues about the social contexts in which the object emerged, the purposes to which it was put and how there might be differences between the meaning of different objects in different cultural settings.<sup>72</sup>

Biography, according to Dant, is always historical; it is concerned with changes over time.<sup>73</sup>

Applying the techniques of biography to the study of Holocaust artefacts can illuminate how objects acquire meaning and how meanings shift and develop over time. This problematises the idea of objects holding fixed meanings, which allow for their representation as 'concrete' examples.

Focusing on the biographies of objects that have been identified by the IWMHE as intrinsic to the Holocaust story highlights their multiple and complex histories, contrary to the Museum's portrayal. Dant has argued the idea of biography adds to the study of the object 'the realisation that the stability of the material object misleads us into thinking that its meaning is steady over time.'<sup>74</sup> A biographical approach demonstrates the instability of meanings generated through tangible, seemingly fixed, objects. Here it is argued objects of the Holocaust have not followed a linear path through time, with meanings fixed within the material remains, but, through biography, their 'life histories' reveal altering meanings and perceptions of the people surrounding. Through this approach, the object's role in authenticating the narrative is disturbed as the meanings ascribed are separated from the objects they seem to naturally accompany.

Biography reveals the possibility of multiple histories, sometimes conflicting, demonstrating the inadequacy of a master narrative within a museum environment. It also illuminates the process in which objects are ascribed meanings, destabilising a belief that an object's meaning is self-evident. Through problematising the approach taken by the

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<sup>71</sup> Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things," 167.

<sup>72</sup> Tim Dant, "Fruitbox/ToolBox: Biography and Objects," accessed February, 2014, <http://eprints.lancs.ac.uk/33403/>.

<sup>73</sup> Tim Dant, "Fruitbox/Toolbox,".

<sup>74</sup> Tim Dant, "Fruitbox/Toolbox,".

IWMHE, this study aims to highlight the fluidity of meanings and encourages engagement with objects as witness to a complex and contentious past. That said, it is important to consider that object biography is not without limitation as it too employs (fictional) techniques of narration. Biography remains as exposed to selection and distortion as any other representational form. What biography does offer, however, is a chance to understand object agency; to demonstrate in an open manner the existence of, and possibilities for, multiple narratives. This is not to suggest, in this instance, the IWMHE 'got history wrong,' but the selective narrative and acquisition of specific objects expresses a particular version of the past impacted by external influences such as historiography, existing Holocaust museums and documentary film.

However unstable the conclusions, understanding the individual life story of an object is important in demonstrating that objects are used in very specific ways, to express specific notions, to present a past in material form that legitimises the narrative through claims of authenticity. An object may be considered an authentic remnant of a past world but the meanings ascribed through the context of the museum are cultural constructs. The same 'authentic' objects have multiple voices, used to say quite different things dependent upon where, and by whom, they are displayed.

#### The Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition

The Holocaust exhibition is situated across the second and third floor of the Imperial War Museum, accessed through the main gallery space. Visitors enter the exhibition on the third floor through a vestibule displaying family photographs and video footage of life before the Nazis. From here, the exhibition leads the visitor through post-First World War Europe, using a familiar staging post to anchor the Holocaust exhibition within a museum of war. Visitors are guided through a history of anti-Semitism, illustrated through a film depicting the roots of European anti-Semitism, before arriving at a section on the Nazis and 'race science'. Objects such as callipers for measuring skull size and eye colour charts are used to illustrate a 'scientific' rationale behind Nazi thought and propaganda. Once this position has been established within the museum attention is drawn towards Nazi propaganda and race hatred, with a clear link created between an outside group and the beginning of isolation and victimisation. The victims, having now been identified, are classified as 'outcasts' and survivor witnesses offer their testimonies of childhood within a short film at this point in the exhibition. As visitors hear survivors describe their experiences of living as outcasts in Nazi Germany, the narrative moves forward to illustrate

thousands of Jews seeking refuge from Germany throughout the world. Before reaching the staircase leading down into the war years, visitors are confronted with the T4 Euthanasia Programme as a prelude to the Holocaust. A white marble dissection table is the last object to be displayed before the outbreak of war in 1939. This offers a sense of foreboding and signals the direction events are to take as visitors enter the second level of the exhibition; the invasion of Poland. This is the first part of the exhibition that explicitly mentions British involvement as the Second World War begins.

As visitors are moved through the invasion of the Soviet Union, photographs and descriptions become focused on a process of destruction rather than persecution. The mobile killing squads are depicted largely through photographs of the Einsatzgruppen and groups of naked victims. From here visitors learn about ghettoisation through survivor testimony videos, objects mainly from the Lodz and Warsaw ghettos and official Nazi photographs taken within the ghetto walls. A section on 'resettlement', which looks at the various journeys taken from the ghettos to camps throughout occupied Europe, precedes the exhibition's section on the Final Solution. Focusing on bureaucratic measures, the Final Solution is represented through a chart on the wall linking various key figures and decision-makers. A typewriter, as the solitary object in this section, represents the nature of the decision-making process and is designed to highlight how decisions were made about the lives of millions of Jews from the banal position of an office desk. This is designed to position the Holocaust as the result of a distanced form of policy-making rather than explicit brutal violence; a point of departure from previous episodes of war and mass violence.

From here visitors are guided towards Auschwitz-Birkenau through a passageway built from a boxcar to depict deportation. Once inside the camps, visitors are given the opportunity to sit and listen to survivor testimonies describing arrival at the camps and conditions within. While conditions and experiences varied greatly between camps, the testimonies do not mention specific location details. Visitors are therefore to assume the descriptions are of Auschwitz-Birkenau as seating is located directly in front of a scale model of the camp. Having passed through the section on camps, visitors are confronted with resistance and hiding before discovery of the camps by the Allied forces. Following photographs of Nazi war criminals, the exhibition ends with a film of survivors reflecting on their experiences of the Holocaust and how it has shaped their lives in Britain after the

Second World War. Visitors are given the opportunity to watch the film seated in an area of reflection before being invited to leave visitor comments on cards provided at the exit.

While there are few studies dedicated to the Imperial War Museum Holocaust exhibition, these are worth briefly reviewing here. Hannah Holtschneider's study of the Holocaust and representations of Jews<sup>75</sup> considers the IWMHE alongside the Jewish Museum in Berlin. Holtschneider's study centres around the presence of Jewishness and constructions of Jewish identity in the exhibition. This has been vital in shaping the thesis here as Holtschneider considers the use of photographs in the representation of the Holocaust and, in particular, of Jews. Building on this, the thesis considers the role of photographs, objects and testimonies in the construction of British identity(ies). Holtschneider's study provides a foundation to exploring themes of Holocaust representation within a museum environment, with a particular focus on notions of alterity and difference, minority-majority relations, and current political concerns within society that have been vital building blocks to developing a thesis on Holocaust memory and identity in Britain today.

Following on from Holtschneider's study, Andy Pearce considers the place of the IWMHE in Britain through his study on British Holocaust consciousness.<sup>76</sup> Pearce's study illuminates the place of the IWMHE in British society and documents its importance in shaping public understanding of the Holocaust in Britain. Pearce has argued the exhibition 'comes to embody some of the foundational aspects of our contemporary thinking about the Holocaust.'<sup>77</sup> Thus, the exhibition provides a compelling case study to begin understanding how the Holocaust is shaped within contemporary Britain; with Pearce's study offering a foundation from which to develop a thesis.

### The Chapters

Situated within debates of museology and memory, this thesis offers a compelling case study on the performative role of the museum in the construction of an official Holocaust memory within Britain and its relationship to national identity. While the Holocaust has become a 'moral touchstone' of contemporary society, used to strengthen and legitimise a variety of causes from animal rights and abortion to policies on war and terrorism, it seems urgent we raise questions of not only *why* we remember the Holocaust, but *what*, exactly,

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<sup>75</sup> Hannah Holtschneider, *The Holocaust and Representations of Jews: History and Identity in the Museum* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>76</sup> Andy Pearce, *Holocaust Consciousness in Contemporary Britain* (London: Routledge, 2014).

<sup>77</sup> Pearce, *Holocaust Consciousness in Contemporary Britain*, 132.

it is we are remembering to establish how effective current approaches are. The oft cited dictum to 'never forget' requires remembrance of the Holocaust to serve a purpose; so that events of Nazi Europe may never be repeated. This ambition has proven hollow, yet countries invest millions in official Holocaust remembrance, commemoration and education. What purpose does the Holocaust serve in twenty-first century Britain? With the Imperial War Museum marked as a potential site for the forthcoming Holocaust learning centre, how memory of the Holocaust is shaped within a museum of modern war becomes a question of vital importance.

Chapter One examines the establishment of a permanent national Holocaust exhibition within the United Kingdom, detailing the original, often conflicting, aims and intentions of the exhibition's curatorial and design teams for a display in a national museum of modern war. Once agreement was reached on the purpose of the Holocaust exhibition, a narrative of the Holocaust 'as it was popularly known'<sup>78</sup> was decided, largely influenced by (British) documentary film and existent global Holocaust museums. Once the narrative had been shaped, material was sought for the exhibition in support of that version.

Chapter Two considers the selection of photographs for the IWMHE and how these support the master narrative. Photographs are an essential element of the storytelling process within the exhibition, and thus the photographs displayed reveal a wealth of knowledge on how the Holocaust is understood and portrayed within the museum. This offers particular insight into the underlying assumptions behind purposeful selections; where photographs are expected to act as evidence that 'speaks for itself'.

Chapter Three explores the material culture and object selection of the IWMHE. The IWMHE project team drew up a 'wish list' of the kinds of artefacts they hoped to find for display, which, without the initial input of a Holocaust historian, was largely based on their knowledge of the Holocaust gained through existing cultural representations (such as existing Holocaust museums Yad Vashem and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, and documentary films *The World at War* (1973-1974), *People's Century* (1995), and *The Nazis: A Warning from History* (1997)). Looking beyond acquisition policy, the method of object biography applied in this chapter demonstrates the instability of culturally ascribed meanings despite the museum's claim to authority. Objects are afforded agency as their biographies illuminate the interpretive process within the museum. With objects within the IWMHE replicating displays at camp museums such as the Auschwitz-

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<sup>78</sup> Suzanne Bardgett, in conversation with author, 13 April, 2013

Birkenau State Museum, their 'authenticity' as remnants of the past can discourage visitors from viewing them as reconstructions. Object biography provides transparency on the shaping of history within the museum through artefactual evidence.

Chapter Four asks how the IWMHE defines the survivor. How is the story shaped through the voice of a survivor choosing Britain, or more specifically, London, as their place of residence following events of the Holocaust? What narratives are incorporated into the exhibition and how are these related to the life histories of the survivor? How are the survivors' stories shaped by the context and how does this affect the stories they tell?

Chapter Five considers the educational programming of the IWMHE and how educational provisions shaped (and shape) the Holocaust exhibition. Here the use of the Holocaust in education is made explicit and provides clues for how the Holocaust is used within the museum and British society more broadly. Each chapter points towards a conclusion on the role of narrative, object and witness in the construction and dissemination of a national Holocaust story. While it is unimaginable that any adult citizen of Britain remains unaware of what the Holocaust was, it seems timely to question just what it is we think we know.

Questions of Holocaust narrative, material culture and testimony dominate the study, underpinned through wider concepts of history, memory, identity and museology in a British context. Beginning with broader concepts of memory and ending with specifics of the methodological approach, the following shall outline the major debates and themes that inform the thesis.

### **Establishing a Permanent National Holocaust Exhibition in Britain**

In order to fully understand how the Holocaust has been shaped by the IWMHE we must first consider the context surrounding the opening of Britain's first permanent national Holocaust exhibition; exploring the decisions made over what such an exhibition should, and could, cover and how the story of the Holocaust should, and could, be told materially. What is widely understood as the Holocaust in Britain is largely influenced by such displays and their supporting literature, thus it seems imperative that we question what that story is according to a significant national museum. This chapter explores the parameters of 'active memory' within the museum as it poses a number of significant questions surrounding the establishment of the IWMHE in terms of what could and, inversely, could not be considered by the institution when bringing the story of the Holocaust to London. The choices in narrative and object selection were directly influenced by the path the exhibition took from the very early stages of planning through to the installation of the exhibition itself. This chapter charts that journey with an aim to move beyond the question of *why* a Holocaust museum in Britain to an unravelling of the complexities of *how* a Holocaust exhibition was created in Britain. This will be used to confront questions on the aims and purposes of the Holocaust as it is perceived within a national museum, acting as the foundation for further debate on how Britain's national museum of modern conflict presents the Holocaust story.

### **The Holocaust at the Imperial War Museum: A History**

The National War Museum, first conceptualised in 1917, was tasked with the collection, preservation and display of articles relating to a war that was, at that time, still being fought. By 1918 this became the Imperial War Museum; inclusive of the experiences of Empire and the Commonwealth. According to Steven Cooke and Lloyd Jenkins,

the urge to memorialise the First World War in the form of a war museum arose in March 1917 out of two distinct needs. Firstly, the new museum was to be part of the Total War policy of the new Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, who recognized the importance of propaganda after the widespread loss of life during the Somme campaign and mounting fears of falling recruitment. Secondly, the need to remember and memorialize the war as a pedagogic tool in order that it

might be prevented in the future was tied to the need to collect and store artefacts and archive material.<sup>79</sup>

The IWM was, as stated by Gaynor Kavanagh, a pioneer in terms of its systematic approach to the recording process, which was born partly out of a propaganda move and partly a sincere attempt at recording the war.<sup>80</sup> The museum began with the aim to document the process of war, to collect artefacts of war with the aim of educating a nation in the detail of war. It is therefore no surprise that a glorified image of war was presented so as to address flailing military recruitment. This had the rather contradictory intention of preventing future war. A sense of pride in Britain's war effort would need to be established as casualties of war were remembered and memorialized through the display of militaria relating to Britain's war effort and that of the opposition.

As collecting began it became clear that many impressive articles of war, such as guns and tanks, would need a dedicated space if they were to be appreciated by an audience made up largely of veterans and their families. In 1926, the museum moved to its current premises; the former Bethlem Royal Hospital building, Britain's infamous psychiatric facility popularly referred to as 'Bedlam'. While the building at that time seemed to fit the purpose of the museum – its central building was adequate enough in size to accommodate the heavy machinery of war that would be displayed – its continued use as a museum of warfare in the twenty-first century raises difficult questions of time, space and memory. In an article on regeneration and the IWM building on Lambeth Road, Cooke and Jenkins raise important questions, which they largely leave unanswered within their article, such as what new layers of meaning does the building of a new Holocaust gallery within the IWM bring? What connections, if any, does the visitor make between the IWM and its former use? Does this affect the readings of the museum and of the history of Britain at war?<sup>81</sup> When establishing an exhibition on the Holocaust, the IWMHE curatorial team were concerned with 'getting the story right' whilst perhaps neglecting an opportunity to make important connections between pasts and present, object and space. Such questions encourage us to consider how meanings of the Holocaust are constructed, rather than fixed, and forces us to consider how other memories may be displaced in favour of more dominant narratives; narratives that do not necessarily interact with the specificity of the locale. The existence of

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<sup>79</sup> Steven Cooke and Lloyd Jenkins, "Discourse of Regeneration in Early Twentieth-Century Britain: From Bedlam to the Imperial War Museum," *Area* 33, no. 4 (Dec., 2001): 384.

<sup>80</sup> Gaynor Kavanagh, "Museum as Memorial: The Origins of the Imperial War Museum," *Journal of Contemporary History* 23, vol. 1 (January 1988): 94.S

<sup>81</sup> Cooke and Jenkins, "Discourse of Regeneration in Early Twentieth-Century Britain," 388.



a war museum on the site of a former psychiatric hospital, for example, would undoubtedly affect how visitors view the exhibits (particularly when confronted with a narrative of Nazi policies towards psychiatric patients) – and questions they would ask – if allowed to make such connections. Highlighting links between past and present encourages understanding of how meanings are shaped for the present and confronts an assumption that those narratives presented within an exhibition space are all that exist – as if an object reaches a display with meaning that is self-evident - objects are inscribed with new meanings at regular intervals. Significance is external, an object only becomes significant when the narrative allows and the narrative of the IWMHE was wholly dependent upon the various forces of power charged with defining the boundaries of Holocaust memory through the museum; namely the IWM Board of Trustees, the IWM Director-General, and members of the Holocaust Exhibition Project Office who were responsible for developing the vision into a reality.

From 1918 to the opening of the Holocaust exhibition in 2000 (and after), the IWM has undergone a number of significant changes to transform it into the museum of today; hosting permanent and temporary historical exhibitions on the theme of Britain (including Empire and the Commonwealth) at war. Throughout the displays, many historical narratives have been constructed to support the learning of visitors surrounding the documents and artefacts held by the museum. Such an approach to history within the museum was championed by Noble Frankland, director of the IWM between 1960 and 1982. During his time at the museum the path was paved for the inclusion of a full narrative display depicting the Nazi persecution of the Jewish people during the Holocaust. Frankland began a programme of modernisation when joining the museum that would allow for the institution to look at war with regards to the 'political, social and economical effects, and the power of devastation and recovery.'<sup>82</sup> The principle was now in place, Suzanne Bardgett, argued, of 'offering the public displays dealing with historical subjects, rather than a series of curios to look at.'<sup>83</sup> The IWM began to educate museum visitors in the historical contexts surrounding its collections, providing full historical narratives of a period or event. Here the IWM began linking objects in its collections through story-telling devices. It was now that connections were made between a 'TV-enthused' public and the museum, as exhibitions such as *The Real Dad's Army* began to draw in greater visitor

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<sup>82</sup> Noble Frankland cited in Suzanne Bardgett, "The Depiction of the Holocaust at the Imperial War Museum since 1961," *Journal of Israeli History* 23, no. 1 (2004): 147.

<sup>83</sup> Bardgett, "The Depiction of the Holocaust at the Imperial War Museum since 1961," 147.

numbers.<sup>84</sup> The IWM offered a 'popular' rendition of warfare underpinned through the documentary and artefactual evidence of its holdings. Bardgett notes how it was not 'especially surprising that there was no examination of the Nazi persecution policies at this time'. The museum, she claimed, had a much narrower focus. 'What mention there was of the Nazis tended to focus on the military strength of their war machines or the inventiveness of their scientists.' The main focus of such exhibitions was on how Britain had won the war rather than an in-depth study of the philosophy of the opposition.<sup>85</sup>

In 1973 the IWM partnered with Thames Television to create a 26 episode series, *The World at War*. Within this series an entire hour-long episode was dedicated to the theme of genocide, dealing solely with the persecution of the Jews at the hands of the Nazis during the Second World War. Considered groundbreaking in its day, this particular episode is credited with bringing the theme of genocide – or more specifically, the Holocaust – to a mass audience. Underpinned by writer and presenter, Michael Darlow's scholarly approach, this documentary aimed to bring the complexities of the subject to an audience who had, until this point, little experience. As Andy Pearce has argued, '*Genocide* was an example of how to render the Holocaust intelligible to a large audience without compromising on integrity.'<sup>86</sup>

Despite this, there were still no exhibitions at the IWM demonstrating explicit links to the Nazi period and the Holocaust. Although, while on the surface little was developing, a series of behind-the-scenes activities began to pave the way for the arrival of Holocaust representation at the IWM. In 1963 a Foreign Documents Centre was set up at the IWM using a grant from the Leverhulme Trust (The Treasury, Bardgett argues, could not be persuaded to fund such an enterprise).<sup>87</sup> The keeper of this centre was Leo Kahn, a previous employee of the Wiener Library, an institution claiming to be 'the world's leading and most extensive archives on the Holocaust and Nazi era',<sup>88</sup> thus it may be argued he took a special interest in Nazi related documentation. During his time with the Centre, Kahn began to 'cement links with archivists overseas [...] The Museum's Film Department also organized several international film conferences at this time – often embracing Third Reich themes.'<sup>89</sup> The involvement of key individuals played a part in this process as those

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<sup>84</sup> Bardgett, "The Depiction of the Holocaust at the Imperial War Museum since 1961," 147.

<sup>85</sup> Bardgett, "The Depiction of the Holocaust at the Imperial War Museum since 1961," 147.

<sup>86</sup> Pearce, *Holocaust Consciousness in Contemporary Britain*, 167.

<sup>87</sup> Bardgett, "The Depiction of the Holocaust at the Imperial War Museum from 1961," 148.

<sup>88</sup> "About," *Wiener Library*, accessed June, 2014, <http://wienerlibrary.co.uk>.

<sup>89</sup> Bardgett, "The Depiction of the Holocaust at the Imperial War Museum from 1961," 148.

with a special interest in Nazi crimes began to shift thinking towards this period and its connections with British war memory.

With these developments, in November 1977 a proposal was put forward for an exhibition on the history of the Third Reich.

Three main sections were proposed: the first, dealing with the years 1919-33, explaining the Nazis rise to power; the second, dealing with the years 1933-42, on the policies, personalities and organization of the Nazi Party; and the third (1942-45) on the consequences of the Nazis' policies. This last section would cover the Party's racial policies and illustrate the concentration camps and their numerous uses and purposes.<sup>90</sup>

The exhibition proposed to display a vast array of militaria including Nazi flags, Nazi uniforms and concentration camp artefacts such as yellow stars, currency from Terezin and Lodz, the key to a cell in Dachau and various whips and clubs taken from the camps.<sup>91</sup>

Unusually for that time, Bardgett claims,

[staff] opinions were canvassed on the wisdom of pursuing 'the German Exhibition', as it was known. The reaction was extremely guarded. Was such a thing justifiable in a museum that was essentially British? [...] Very unfortunately for the Museum, details of the exhibition were leaked to the press, and *The Guardian* ran a piece that cast the whole project in a very unfavourable light.<sup>92</sup>

As a result, the exhibition was postponed indefinitely. Bardgett wondered whether the exhibition could have been pursued had it focused on the persecution policies rather than ambiguously on the Third Reich where it could be seen to be encouraging certain attitudes towards the Jewish population. This option, Bardgett explains, 'appears not to have been considered. Why? Such a notion was not unthinkable, especially after *The World at War* had provided such a fine model of how the story *could* be told.'<sup>93</sup> The Holocaust, at this time, was considered marginal to the IWM's remit. The Holocaust had not been openly discussed within public forums in Britain and, importantly, there had not yet been a significant framework established to incorporate the Jewish Holocaust into the British narrative of war (which would be a vital factor in bringing the Holocaust into a museum of war). Though progress had been made in linking the concepts of war and the genocide of the Jews with *The World at War*, the IWM was not in a position to develop this further. If, as we shall see, it appeared difficult to curate an exhibition on the Holocaust in the mid 1990s, then it would have been near impossible in the 1970s. While the documentary was

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<sup>90</sup> Bardgett, "The Depiction of the Holocaust at the Imperial War Museum from 1961," 148.

<sup>91</sup> Bardgett, "The Depiction of the Holocaust at the Imperial War Museum from 1961," 148.

<sup>92</sup> Bardgett, "The Depiction of the Holocaust at the Imperial War Museum from 1961," 149-150.

<sup>93</sup> Bardgett, "The Depiction of the Holocaust at the Imperial War Museum from 1961," 150.

received largely positively, an exhibition displaying the artefacts of persecution, it was believed, would create controversy the IWM hoped to avoid. While an exhibition on the Holocaust, or at least dealing in part with the Holocaust, had failed to materialise, the IWM were certainly moving towards this end as they began to consider the history of the Third Reich as a part of their remit, albeit marginal, in terms of who Britain was at war against. Arguably this set the tone for how any later exhibitions dealing with this topic would or could be approached. Germany, at this early stage, became a kind of 'anti-Britain'. As the theme of Germany began to spread throughout the IWM, oral testimonies on the 'German experience' were sought. 'In 1978 the Museum's Department of Sound Records embarked on an oral history project to record the experiences of refugees who had fled Nazi Germany in the 1930s.'<sup>94</sup> The plan had been to record the experiences of those interned by the British government as 'enemy aliens' during the 1940s, however the testimony had a far greater reach and here began a collection of oral testimonies relating to the Holocaust, which directed the IWM towards a collection on this theme. Ironically, despite an early engagement with the experiences of enemy aliens, this is a theme the IWM have avoided since installing its permanent Holocaust galleries, marking a shift in discourse as interest grew in the experiences of Holocaust victims.

In 1990 an exhibition held at the House of Commons to mark the 45<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Buchenwald report was transferred to the IWM. Tony Kushner has reported that as a result the museum director 'realised the lack of information they held on the Shoah, and has consequently agreed to hold more Holocaust material.' The IWM's response, Kushner states, was to 'concentrate on material relating to Belsen Concentration Camp'<sup>95</sup> and in 1991 an exhibition focusing on the liberation of Belsen, dedicated entirely to the topic of the Holocaust, was curated and displayed by the IWM. 'The display told the story of the camp's liberation, using photographs, film, sound recordings, paintings and artifacts – including a jumper worn by Auschwitz survivor Anita Lasker-Wallfisch', which was later incorporated into the permanent Holocaust Exhibition opened in 2000. 'Drawing as it did solely on material held in the Museum at the time, the Belsen Exhibition told little of the camp's history before April 1945. Nor did it try to place the liberation in the broader context of Hitler's war against the Jews.' But it was, as Bardgett highlights, an important step and drew many positive comments from the visiting public.<sup>96</sup> As Tony Kushner argues,

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<sup>94</sup> Bardgett, "The Depiction of the Holocaust at the Imperial War Museum from 1961," 151.

<sup>95</sup> Tony Kushner, *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination: A social and cultural history* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 1997), 264.

<sup>96</sup> Bardgett, "The Depiction of the Holocaust at the Imperial War Museum from 1961," 153.

this exhibition was perhaps 'biased towards the representation of Belsen as a British rather than a Jewish camp but the two are at least brought together in a form unthinkable for many years after the liberation.'<sup>97</sup>

The reception of the Belsen exhibition undoubtedly contributed to the IWM's sense that it could tackle difficult subjects, and could do so in a way that engaged rather than alienated museum visitors. With new found confidence through the display of a potentially controversial subject, the IWM opened a small photographic exhibition in 1993, on the fiftieth anniversary of the Warsaw ghetto uprising, on the theme of the Warsaw ghetto, which Barbie Zelizer states 'provided a recycled visual record of events.'<sup>98</sup> No new ground was broken here in terms of what the public knew of the Holocaust, however there was a hint that the IWM began to change its attitude towards the approach it could take. Tony Kushner has highlighted that, although small in scale and funded by Jewish benefactors, 'it was the first IWM exhibition covering the Jewish experience of the Holocaust and one of only a very few presented by a national British cultural institution since 1945.' Kushner identified this as a landmark in the story of Britain and the Holocaust 'even if the further goal of a specific museum devoted to the Jewish catastrophe remains [at this point] totally unrealized.'<sup>99</sup>

In 1995 the IWM contributed towards the touring exhibition *After Auschwitz: Responses to the Holocaust in Contemporary Art*, which was a part of the liberation of Auschwitz commemorations of that year. The IWM continued to play it safe in terms of what it would present on this theme. Despite now committing to covering the Holocaust in its exhibition displays, the narratives selected failed to offer any challenge to public perceptions, but rather reinforced already accepted interpretations. As Andy Pearce has suggested, the IWM exhibition on Belsen 'played on and reinforced cultural understandings and perceptions of the camp perpetuated throughout the postwar epoch.' While, as Pearce has identified, there was a 'steady growth in Holocaust-related representational work'<sup>100</sup> within the IWM throughout the 1990s, there was nothing to suggest a potential permanent Holocaust gallery would offer anything more than a reiteration of popular manifestations of the Holocaust of the time. By now the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (hereafter USHMM) had opened, and in 1994 the IWM had entered serious discussions to

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<sup>97</sup> Kushner, "The Memory of Belsen," 197-198.

<sup>98</sup> Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory Through the Camera's Eye* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 195.

<sup>99</sup> Kushner, *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination*, 264-265.

<sup>100</sup> Pearce, *Holocaust Consciousness in Contemporary Britain*, 113-114.

build a vast exhibition dedicated to the theme of genocide, of which the Holocaust would make up the majority part.

#### Man's Inhumanity to Man: Planning an Exhibition on Genocide in Our Time

'There are broadly universal reasons why every country should have a Holocaust museum,' stated Holocaust historian, David Cesarani, campaigner for, and later historical advisor to, a permanent Holocaust exhibition in London. Arguing the case for a Holocaust museum in Britain, Cesarani claimed the Holocaust *is* a part of British history:

Britain was a place of refuge for Jews fleeing Nazism, a fact that calls for appreciation and celebration. Britain's refusal to surrender and her magnificent war effort were fundamental to the defeat of Germany, thereby saving what Jews remained in German hands. British troops liberated Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, an event which has become a part of British national identity and which, tellingly, was the IWM's first point of access into the history of the Holocaust. Today many refugees, survivors and even perpetrators are British citizens: the Holocaust is a part of their life story. It touches their children, too. It can no longer be treated as something that happened 'long ago', 'over there' to 'somebody else'.<sup>101</sup>

In a BBC2 documentary broadcast in January 1995, written and presented by Cesarani as a part of the BBC *Remember Season* commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, he argues the memorial in Hyde Park is no longer adequate and 'cannot transmit the truth of what occurred in the Holocaust.' Cesarani describes the USHMM as a 'powerful educational weapon' claiming that, while there are over a hundred similar institutions within the United States, not a single one existed in Britain at that time.<sup>102</sup>

The USHMM opened to critical acclaim in April 1993, closely followed by the release of Steven Spielberg's Holocaust feature film, *Schindler's List* in November. This had a great effect on raising both awareness and curiosity in a subject that had, until this point, sparked little widespread interest. Ben Helfgott, chairman of the Board of Deputies of British Jews' Yad Vashem Committee (later the Board of Deputies of British Jews, hereafter BoD), acknowledged that while there had never previously been opposition to establishing a Holocaust museum in Britain, neither had there been any enthusiasm for the idea.<sup>103</sup> As

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<sup>101</sup> David Cesarani, "Should Britain have a National Holocaust Museum?" *Journal of Holocaust Education* 7, No. 3 (1998): 19.

<sup>102</sup> David Cesarani, *Bringing the Holocaust Home*, TV, (1995, BBC Remember Season).

<sup>103</sup> Simon Roker, "Lottery Money Plan for a British Holocaust Museum," *Jewish Chronicle*, November 18, 1994, 1.

public interest in the Holocaust grew, the IWM began to float the idea of a Holocaust exhibition existing within the confines of their remit, which was to

collect, preserve and display material and information bearing upon the two World Wars and other military operations since August 1914 in which Great Britain or other members of the Commonwealth have been involved.<sup>104</sup>

Suzanne Bardgett was appointed coordinator of a project at this stage entitled *Man's Inhumanity to Man*, which began exploring the possibility of creating an exhibition dedicated to genocide as an aspect of warfare in the twentieth century. Then IWM director-general, Alan Borg felt if there was support for a Holocaust museum in London, the IWM 'would be the obvious place to have it.'<sup>105</sup> Ben Helfgott agreed owing to its 'reasonably central' position and the thousands of visitors the museum already attracted.<sup>106</sup> Here the logic seemed to be for a large national museum to exhibit the Holocaust for the benefits of a large visiting public rather than a consideration of how the story of the Holocaust might be told. At this stage there was little concern for the hosting of an exhibition on the persecution of the Jews of Europe within a museum dedicated to documenting war, and doing so largely through the heavy machinery designed for destruction.

As the IWM began discussions for an extension to the main building on Lambeth Road, London that could accommodate a new gallery space, Euromet, a private group of Jewish business men and women headed by Israel Weinstock, expressed interest in creating a multimillion pound Holocaust centre. This would incorporate a museum space and educational facilities in London, entirely separate from the IWM proposal. In March 1995, this private group unveiled their plans, which looked at building a smaller version of the USHMM; a narrative museum that would tell the story of the Holocaust.<sup>107</sup> Such an approach had been discarded by the IWM as they intended to follow a route more akin to the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, which focused more broadly on genocide while emphasising the specific nature of the Holocaust. From this it becomes evident the location and approach chosen for a museum of the Holocaust would have an inescapable impact upon how the Holocaust would be presented to the visiting public (and to how the Holocaust would be understood by future generations in Britain). Here the restrictive remit

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<sup>104</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Trustees held at the IWM, February 12, 1997, Exhibition Design File, Holocaust Exhibition Archive, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>105</sup> Rucker, "Lottery Money Plan for a British Holocaust Museum," 1.

<sup>106</sup> Rucker, "Lottery Money Plan for a British Holocaust Museum," 1.

<sup>107</sup> Suzanne Bardgett, in conversation with the author, April 9, 2013.

of the IWM would be pushed to its limits as IWM Trustees began questioning what these limits were in light of what they needed to be to accommodate an exhibition dedicated to the Nazi genocide of the Jews.

Despite Alan Borg's enthusiasm for an exhibition dealing with genocide in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the IWM Board of Trustees did not offer unanimous support for the proposed project. IWM Trustee, Sir Admiral Jeremy Black questioned the appropriateness of the museum undertaking such a project. 'Its terms of reference,' he said, 'were centred upon Great Britain and the Commonwealth and the conflicts in which they had been engaged since August 1914.' The Holocaust, he felt, 'was a low priority on the Museum's agenda.'<sup>108</sup> IWM Trustee, Ian Smart felt that, as a museum of conflict; its courses, effects and its roots, genocide did sit within the remit of the museum. He advised, however, that this would need careful handling. 'The IWM, being Commonwealth and United Kingdom centric, could not expect to cover the whole canvas.'<sup>109</sup> This inevitably affected the story the exhibition could tell, the narrative would have to provide a sufficiently British interpretation to justify its existence within the national museum of conflict involving Britain, the Empire and Commonwealth. Borg maintained that future generations would not remember individual military operations (publicly at least), but it would be 'such matters as vast-scale genocide' that would become a pertinent and memorable aspect of Second World War history. There was a movement, he predicted, to have this recorded in Britain as Britain, in 1995, was among one of the few European countries not doing so. 'If Britain was to do so, the Imperial War Museum,' in Borg's view, 'was the right place to do it. Moreover, the funding for it should be expected to come from sources other than the Grant-in-Aid.'<sup>110</sup> It became clear that an opportunity had arisen to apply for funding on the strength of providing a facility dedicated to the Holocaust. Borg was keen to ensure the IWM would attract such funding as an existent museum dealing with war and its effects on the people of Britain. As it seemed inevitable that a museum of the Holocaust would soon open in Britain (and would do so with substantial financial support and media attention), the IWM were eager to ensure it would be their institution undertaking the task. This had consequences for the Holocaust narrative constructed within a national museum of modern conflict, within which Britain's heroic war record remained, and still remains, untarnished.

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<sup>108</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Trustees, February 15, 1995, Exhibition Design File, Holocaust Exhibition Archive, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>109</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Trustees, February 15, 1995.

<sup>110</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Trustees, February 15, 1995.



In April 1995, then BoD joint vice-president, Eric Moonman voiced concerns over the plans for a genocide exhibition at the IWM, London. While the initial plans were to devote the exhibition largely to the Holocaust, its broad focus on genocide, inspired by the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, concerned members of the Jewish community in Britain. Moonman believed 'the blueprint should be Washington's Holocaust Memorial Museum, which goes into the history of the Shoah in more depth.'<sup>111</sup> Moonman stated how the BoD were looking very seriously at the proposal of a Jewish group, made up of business men and women (Euromet), to build a Holocaust museum in London focusing entirely on the history of the Holocaust, in much the same way, albeit a smaller scale, as the USHMM. Moonman stated the BoD intended to 'explore all avenues to ensure that the museum offered in London is both true to the memory of those who died and provides an educational tool for generations to come.'<sup>112</sup> David Cesarani, who had publicly spoken of the need for a Holocaust museum in Britain, was equally as public with his disdain for the project in its early form. Cesarani felt the proposed genocide exhibition would 'encourage "inappropriate" comparisons between the Holocaust and other atrocities.' Speaking to the *Jewish Chronicle* in June 1995, Cesarani stated 'the concept is wrong [...] It is fundamentally unsound, even dangerous.'<sup>113</sup> Cesarani called for pressure to be placed on the IWM 'to alter its "unacceptable" proposals.'<sup>114</sup> Undoubtedly aware that such loss of support from the Jewish community would irreparably damage funding opportunities for the new proposed gallery space, the IWM considered the possibility of creating an exhibition dedicated entirely to the Holocaust. Alan Borg and chairman of the IWM Board of Trustees, Lord Bramall undertook a visit to the USHMM. 'The Imperial War Museum,' Borg suggested, 'could do something smaller but very good and quite different.'<sup>115</sup> Borg and Bramall believed the USHMM to be 'more understated' than the Museum of Tolerance, but when asked whether the IWM intended to continue with its wider brief, Borg responded that the IWM still intended to create an exhibition that extended beyond the Holocaust.<sup>116</sup> The IWM was now tasked with developing an exhibition that would both situate the Holocaust within a wider context of genocide and do justice to the story of the Jewish Holocaust. The IWM

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<sup>111</sup> Simon Rocker, "Board Leader Voices Doubts Over Plans for Holocaust Museum," *Jewish Chronicle*, April 21, 1995, 7.

<sup>112</sup> Rocker, "Board Leader Voices Doubts Over Plans for Holocaust Museum," 7.

<sup>113</sup> Simon Rocker, "Historian Attacks 'Inappropriate' Plan for UK Holocaust Museum," *Jewish Chronicle*, June 16, 1995, 8.

<sup>114</sup> Rocker, "Historian Attacks 'Inappropriate' Plan for UK Holocaust Museum," 8.

<sup>115</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Trustees, June 7, 1995, Exhibition Design File, Holocaust Exhibition Archive, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>116</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Trustees, June 7, 1995.

pledged to create something more in-line with the USHMM with all discussions of 'other genocides' temporarily silenced.

With this, in July 1995, The BoD officially endorsed plans for a permanent Holocaust exhibition housed within a planned extension to the IWM building on Lambeth Road, London. They welcomed the concept stating it to be 'a most imaginative and important initiative not just for the Jewish community but for the whole of British society.' It would, they claimed, 'constitute a valuable educational resource for young people and do much to transmit awareness of the Holocaust within the wider society.'<sup>117</sup> This, as Andy Pearce contends, 'dealt a fatal blow' to the Holocaust centre proposed by the private Jewish group.<sup>118</sup> With the support of the Jewish community, the Institute of Contemporary History, the Wiener Library, the Spiro Institute, the Holocaust Education Trust and the Institute of Jewish affairs, the IWM pushed ahead with plans to extend the museum to house a genocide and Holocaust 'museum-within-the-Museum.' The IWM justified its inclusion of a section devoted to the Holocaust and genocide as, they claimed, this is 'a central event in the remit of the IWM, Britain's national museum of twentieth century conflict.'<sup>119</sup> This demonstrates a complete change in attitude from two decades previously when the Holocaust, and even the Third Reich, were considered to fall outside of the museum's coverage. This can perhaps be understood as a part of a movement towards broader public awareness of the Holocaust and genocide in general (particularly in light of Yugoslavia and Rwanda in the mid 1990s). The IWM were reacting to the mood of the time as significant public interest in the theme of genocide was identified. Although, rather than taking a lead in presenting themes of war and genocide to the public, they rely on a reiteration of what the public are already becoming aware of through other popular mediums (particularly film and television). This is a surprising approach for an institution who 'seek to provide for, and to encourage, the study and understanding of the history of modern war and 'wartime experience'.<sup>120</sup> In this sense they do less to actively encourage further study than to merely reproduce what is already common knowledge, which marks a return to 'playing it safe.'

The IWM considered itself best placed 'to meet the call for a museum in the UK dealing with the Holocaust and to do so in an objective historical fashion demonstrating its crucial

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<sup>117</sup> Board Paper 1995/3 Item 9 (Encl D) IWM Lambeth Road Redevelopment: Man's Inhumanity to Man, Holocaust Exhibition Archive, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>118</sup> Andy Pearce, *Holocaust Consciousness in Contemporary Britain*, 116.

<sup>119</sup> Board Paper 1995/3 Item 9 (Encl D) IWM Lambeth Road Redevelopment: Man's Inhumanity to Man.

<sup>120</sup> "About Us," Imperial War Museum, London, accessed June, 2014, <http://iwm.org.uk>.

place in the context of modern history.<sup>121</sup> Put more precisely, the IWM was perhaps best positioned to construct a Holocaust story using the framework of war, beginning at the end of the First World War and ending with the Second World War. Arguably however, for many, the war played a minor role in their experiences of the Holocaust thus rendering warfare a limiting structure. Contextualising the Holocaust as a part of the Second World War neglects the intricate histories of individuals and focuses on the systems of power; the rise of Hitler, a racial state, the outbreak of war, the ghettos, the liberation of the camps, and war crimes trials. As Tony Kushner has highlighted:

Throughout discussions when it was suggested that partly following the example of Washington there was a need to explain Jewish life and culture before the Holocaust, the response was firmly that the Imperial War Museum was not and could not become a museum of ethnography. As we have seen, this is not necessarily true – it has functioned from the start implicitly or not explicitly as a, if not *the*, museum attempting to represent the nature of Britishness, or more narrowly, Englishness, to the people of the nation.<sup>122</sup>

The IWM now intended to offer an in-depth exploration of the Holocaust in much the same way as the USHMM. Situating the exhibition within a museum of British warfare, however, would provide a framework that, despite Suzanne Bardgett's contention that this was 'useful, rather than restrictive,'<sup>123</sup> was limiting in its ability to deliver a narrative of the Holocaust that could adequately represent the lives of the individuals affected. The Holocaust here inescapably becomes a part of war, and while it can be, and is, understood historically as a part of the Second World War, this is not the only framework that can, or should, be applied. There are many reflections of the Holocaust, in both memory and representation, which do not consider war a part of the Holocaust experience; placing these in the context of war shapes their meanings in entirely new ways. This framework is also overloaded with baggage in terms of British national identity.

While a move to focus an exhibition entirely on the Holocaust had been implemented, Lord Bramall cautioned that 'despite tackling this theme with funding from the Jewish Community the IWM should not be diverted from its treatment of the more general

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<sup>121</sup> Board Paper 1995/3 Item 9 (Encl D) IWM Lambeth Road Redevelopment: Man's Inhumanity to Man.

<sup>122</sup> Tony Kushner, "The Holocaust and the Museum World in Britain: A study of ethnography," *Immigrants and Minorities: Historical Studies in Ethnicity, Migration and Diaspora* 21, No. 1-2 (2002): 23.

<sup>123</sup> Suzanne Badgett, "Exhibiting Hatred," Imperial War Museum, London, accessed January, 2012, [http://iwm.org.uk/download/documents\\_exhibiting\\_hatred](http://iwm.org.uk/download/documents_exhibiting_hatred).

aspects of conflict.<sup>124</sup> Then deputy director-general, Robert Crawford (later director-general) stressed his opinion the museum was indeed 'the appropriate place to house the nation's Holocaust exhibition.' Crawford perceived the role of the exhibition to be in the establishment of the key features of 'the horrors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century conflicts.' As a means of diffusing tensions between those who felt the Holocaust should stand alone and those who felt a broader perspective of genocide in the 20<sup>th</sup> century was needed, Crawford suggested separating the presentations, 'making in effect two exhibitions, one on the Holocaust, the other on cases of large-scale inhumanities, with no comparisons drawn between them.' IWM Trustee, Ian Smart was uncomfortable with a suggestion for two separate exhibitions as, despite his admission to a difference in scale, he felt that the Holocaust should be incorporated into a broader exhibition on genocide. Crawford, however, stressed that creating two separate exhibitions was the only way 'to avoid the Museum's ceaseless entanglement in ongoing arguments which the earlier contextual concept was already generating.' Having two separate exhibitions, it was believed, would keep all interested parties happy. Smart, however, felt there were similarities between the subjects on the two proposals with IWM Trustee, James Wright, fearing the Holocaust concept would lose force if separated from the original context of *Man's Inhumanity to Man*. Alan Borg declared that Crawford's concept 'met all the Trustees' requirements'<sup>125</sup> thus the proposal was divided into two separate divisions; the Holocaust and genocide. While the Holocaust exhibition was planned as a permanent fixture within the museum, the contextual exhibition on genocide had a lifespan of ten years.

By the end of 1995, Robert Crawford had taken over as director-general of the IWM. The museum had been informed the scheme *Man's Inhumanity to Man* was eligible to apply for a Heritage Lottery Fund, which would part-fund the project to a maximum of 75 percent of the budget. With the acquisition of funds looking positive, Crawford began a programme of research for the Holocaust exhibition and a search for artefacts was underway. Crawford had visited the Beth Shalom Centre in Nottinghamshire (now The National Holocaust Centre and Museum) claiming its approach differed to that intended by the IWM. Lord Bramall reminded Trustees at this stage that exhibitions 'were mainly comprised of objects and images and they should not try to be "books on walls". Their message,' he claimed,

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<sup>124</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Trustees held onboard HMS Belfast, September 6, 1995, Exhibition Design File, Holocaust Exhibition Archive, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>125</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Trustees held onboard HMS Belfast, September 6, 1995.

'needed to be simple.'<sup>126</sup> At the early stages of planning, it was decided the message transmitted through the Holocaust exhibition should be uncomplicated; any uncertainties needed to be ironed out so as not to confuse the visitor.

In July 1996 a conference in London jointly organised by the Wiener Library and Parkes Centre, Southampton looked at the theme of the Holocaust and British museums. Historian Mark Mazower suggested that perhaps the IWM was not the place for a museum on the Holocaust and went further to state that, perhaps, Britain as a country is not a suitable location for a Holocaust museum. 'While I think there should probably be Holocaust museums on the continent where it happened, there seem other areas of British history which seem at least as important.' Mazower's preference would have been for a museum dealing with the theme of genocide more generally, or slavery, a theme with an explicit relevance for a wider section of the British audience.<sup>127</sup> David Cesarani defended the IWM's move to depict the Holocaust as distinct from other forms of genocide stating that such exhibitions 'taught children basic moral values, what it was to be a responsible citizen and that democratic values are not automatically sustained but need to be nurtured and protected.'<sup>128</sup> At the core of this argument was the call for a Holocaust museum in Britain, as one of the few European countries without one, and the need to find a particularly British story that would speak to the British public in a relevant and engaging way. As Cesarani defends the need for a museum to display this part of 'British history,' connections are made between Britain and the events unfolding throughout occupied Europe that are not wholly organic. For example, A series of displays entitled *News reaches Britain* attempts to anchor the exhibition within a British context. There becomes an urgent need to find relevance in the Holocaust story, which leads to the inclusion of certain narratives at the expense of those considered unsuited to the audience. For Mazower, there are those aspects of British history that already explicitly speak to a British audience without the need to search for tentative relevance; arguably such themes as the history of the slave trade in Britain, or colonial genocide in the age of Empire. What this overlooks, however, is the genuine links between aspects of British history (such as slavery and colonial genocide) and the actions of the Nazis during the Holocaust. The problem is not with a lack of connection to the Holocaust, but rather with the lack of a suitable framework around which

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<sup>126</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Trustees held at the IWM, Lambeth Road, November 22, 1995, Exhibition Design File, Holocaust Exhibition Archive, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>127</sup> Simon Rocker and Susannah Cusworth, "Historian Slams Holocaust Museum Plan as Wasteful," *Jewish Chronicle*, July 5, 1996, 10.

<sup>128</sup> Rocker and Cusworth, "Historian Slams Holocaust Museum Plan as Wasteful," 10.

such links can be openly debated and discussed. The discomfort of public institutions such as the IWM in creating bridges between 'British history' and a history of Europe more broadly has resulted in a decontextualisation of the Holocaust; the Holocaust now appears cut adrift from mainstream thinking of the time. The Nazis, therefore, appear as an evil Other rather than a logical product of time or place. This is certainly not to suggest the Holocaust was a logical outcome of the twentieth century, but that 'evil' is a problematic category when discussing the full context of European thought and action during this period. The development of eugenics and 'race theory' to justify the slave trade has been removed from the record despite its ability to reframe how we understand the Holocaust and Nazism in Britain.

In February 1997, with plans for the development of the IWM, Lambeth Road well underway, IWM Trustee Jeremy Black raised concerns over the museum's aims and objectives with the proposed exhibitions. Black felt the museum had 'lost sight of why it was there and what it should be presenting.' He feared that a move towards representing 'Conflict in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century' was problematic as there were, he claimed, 'many areas of that theme which the Museum did not cover and it would not be proper for it to do so. The function of the Museum was, he said, more to do with conflicts in which British or Commonwealth Forces had been engaged since 1914.' While he could understand the reasoning behind the museum's inclusion of the Holocaust in its exhibitionary space it was, he believed, 'marginal to the Museum's main themes.'<sup>129</sup> Rather than suggest the Holocaust shouldn't be included within the IWM's display, Black suggested that perhaps it was time the museum reconsidered its stated aims for the future. Lord Bramall agreed that to look at the stated aims would be a positive move, however, in terms of the inclusion of the Holocaust on the museum's programming he confirmed he 'wished to see due prominence given to the war efforts of Britain and of the Commonwealth countries that had fought at her side.'<sup>130</sup> The Holocaust, it seemed, would be incorporated into the narrative of Britain at war, thus suggesting the Jewish plight in Nazi occupied Europe to be a major aspect of the British Second World War narrative. The Second World War here centres on the rescue and liberation of the Jews, a grossly misleading perspective. IWM Trustee, Dennis Silk confirmed this position during a Board of Trustees meeting where he claimed the Holocaust to be 'at the centre of what the Second World War had been about.'

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<sup>129</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Trustees held at the IWM, Lambeth Road, February 12, 1997, Exhibition Design File, Holocaust Exhibition Archive, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>130</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Trustees held at the IWM, Lambeth Road, February 12, 1997.

That is, the 'human side of conflict'.<sup>131</sup> However, the IWM had until this point focused on the British experience of war, how would it begin constructing an exhibition around the Jewish experience of war from a British perspective?

It became apparent the IWM would need to consider whether the future of the museum was in focusing on Great Britain and the Commonwealth or whether they should expand to explore wider themes. The Holocaust, IWM Trustee, Moray Stewart believed, was not obviously caught in the former definition.<sup>132</sup> Though Bramall argued there were, indeed, very few conflicts that Britain had not been in some way associated with. The IWM's route in to the Holocaust, then, was through involvement of the Second World War. The IWM was there, Robert Crawford stated, 'to tell the story, since 1914, of wars in which Britain and the Commonwealth had been involved. The Holocaust,' he argued, 'was part of this story'.<sup>133</sup> Trustee, Ian Smart believed there needed to be 'core references to the experiences and roles of Britain and its Commonwealth Allies'.<sup>134</sup> Smart did state, however, the IWM had a wider explanatory role, 'which included, for example, questions of why and with what results the United Kingdom and Commonwealth countries had become involved in the major wars of the twentieth century. The museum had to tackle,' in his view, 'such questions as the origins of the Second World War, the manner in which it has been conducted, and its outcomes. Within this historical framework the Holocaust,' Smart stresses, 'was something of major importance'.<sup>135</sup> Robert Crawford thought it inconceivable the IWM would survive in to the twenty-first century without dealing with the Holocaust; especially with its recent inclusion on the National Curriculum for England and Wales. The Holocaust would be considered a major part of Second World War history, despite the fact, in this context, that it predates the outbreak of war by several years. For the British angle adopted by the IWM, the Holocaust only became relevant in 1939 (although reference is made to the refugees from Nazism prior to the outbreak of war); the Holocaust, Crawford claimed, 'had been the principal beastliness of an evil regime which Britain and her Allies

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<sup>131</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Trustees held at the IWM, Lambeth Road, February 12, 1997.

<sup>132</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Trustees held at the IWM, Lambeth Road, February 12, 1997.

<sup>133</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Trustees held at the IWM, Lambeth Road, February 12, 1997.

<sup>134</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Trustees held at the IWM, Lambeth Road, February 12, 1997.

<sup>135</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Trustees held at the IWM, Lambeth Road, February 12, 1997.

had resisted and had ultimately destroyed.<sup>136</sup> This perspective perpetuates the myth of 'Britain alone' fighting a just war and reaffirms the position of the Holocaust within a British narrative of war.

By June 1997 all had agreed the Holocaust held its place within the IWM remit, with its reevaluation, in the context of the Second World War and it was wholly appropriate for Britain to have such an exhibition. Then deputy chairman of the IWM Board of Trustees, Robert O'Neill, believed creating a Holocaust exhibition would be 'a good way of positioning the Imperial War Museum for a bigger share of public interest in the Twenty First Century.'<sup>137</sup> Interest in the Holocaust had been predicted to bring a new generation of visitors to Britain's national museum of modern conflict, and so the museum proceeded with plans to open Britain's first permanent Holocaust exhibition.

### The Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition

The IWM intended to create a display on the Holocaust that would complement their existing exhibitions, detailing the Nazi persecution of the Jews and other victim groups beginning in 1933 and ending in 1945. The Holocaust exhibition was to fulfil an important educational role, detailing events of the Holocaust in narrative form to casual visitors as well as organised school groups. To provide context, the exhibition begins its story at the end of the First World War providing a 'thorough history lesson on the rise of Hitler and the nature of the Nazi regime.'<sup>138</sup> Using familiar historical markers assists in the teaching of Second World War history in schools. Director-general, Robert Crawford discussed the centrality of the Holocaust in Second World War history and 'the fact that there was now a "black hole" in the Museum's coverage of the story.'<sup>139</sup> Lord Bramall, wrote personally to gain the support of the Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat leaders, which followed unquestioned. In 1996, then Labour Party leader, Tony Blair said the Holocaust exhibition should serve as Britain's 'site of remembrance ... and act as a symbol of our diligence that never again will man's evil capabilities have such despicable consequences.' Leader of the Liberal Democrats, Paddy Ashdown echoed the exhibition would be 'a permanent reminder

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<sup>136</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Trustees held at the IWM, Lambeth Road, February 12, 1997.

<sup>137</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Trustees held at the IWM, Lambeth Road, June 4, 1997, Exhibition Design File, Holocaust Exhibition Archive, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>138</sup> Suzanne Bardgett, "The Genesis and Development of the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition Project," *The Journal of Holocaust Education* 7, no. 3 (Winter 1998): 28.

<sup>139</sup> Minutes of the meeting of the Board of Trustees held at the IWM, Lambeth Road, February 12, 1997.



of man's inhumanity to man and a powerful lesson about the evil of persecution and genocide.<sup>140</sup> While such sentiments appear rather empty given that two opposing parties echoed each other's statement without any reflection on reality (of course, 'man's inhumanity to man' will and has again demonstrated 'despicable consequences'), the IWM capitalised on such open, albeit uninformed, support as it confirmed it would be opening a permanent Holocaust exhibition at its Lambeth site. The politicisation of Holocaust memory in Britain was now clarified as ownership moved from the personal to the public sphere; what the exhibition sought to cover was now on the agenda.

The aim of the Holocaust exhibition was to 'place on record in the UK's museum of twentieth century conflict a narrative historical exhibition about the Holocaust,' outlining two major themes: 'Did you know that while the Second World War was being fought, another struggle was going on between the Nazi state and the Jews of Europe?' And, 'Did you know that around the middle of this century a civilised western state opened a campaign of genocide against a people who had lived in Europe for centuries?'<sup>141</sup> These two questions were to be answered throughout the exhibition and were targeted at two visitor group profiles. For the older generation, those who had lived through the war, the exhibition asks whether they knew of the struggle of the Jews and, for the younger generation, the exhibition aims to place on record the story of the genocide against 'a people.' It was decided there was a need for a 'firm storyline.' Visitors, it was claimed within an exhibition philosophy paper, would need to be 'gripped by the plot, and become involved in it.'<sup>142</sup> Robert Crawford maintained 'some simplification would be necessary in a story of such complexity.'<sup>143</sup> A list of the main topics to be covered was drawn up (which would later be divided into 27 sections of the exhibition, known as the chapters). The display was to include sections on the rise of Hitler, Nazi racial theories and the euthanasia programme, the outbreak of the Second World War and the nature of occupied Europe, the establishment of the ghettos, the activities of the Einsatzgruppen, the concentration camp system and the death camps of occupied Poland, the reaction of the outside world to news

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<sup>140</sup> Tony Blair and Paddy Ashdown cited in Suzanne Bardgett, "Holocaust Exhibition," *Report: Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition*, (Winter 1996/1997), 1.

<sup>141</sup> Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition philosophy paper for the Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition Advisory Group meeting, April 15, 1996, Exhibition Design File, Holocaust Exhibition Archive, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>142</sup> Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition philosophy paper for the Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition Advisory Group meeting, April 15, 1996

<sup>143</sup> Note of the third meeting of the Holocaust Exhibition Advisory Group held at the Imperial War Museum, June 12, 1997, Exhibition Design File, Holocaust Exhibition Archive, Imperial War Museum, London.

of the extermination policies and underground activity, and the discovery of conditions inside the camps in 1945.<sup>144</sup> These topics were mainly inspired through Holocaust documentaries such as *The World at War* (1973-1974), particularly the genocide episode, *Peoples Century* (1995), particularly 1933: Master Race, and Laurence Rees' *The Nazis: A Warning From History* (1997), and existing Holocaust museums such as the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, USHMM in Washington, DC, Yad Vashem in Israel, and the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum in Poland. The exhibition's story was constructed largely through existing 'popular' narratives of the Holocaust; pre-existing stories that would be recognisable by museum visitors. The newly established Holocaust Exhibition Project Office (hereafter HEPO), headed by Suzanne Bardgett, began searching for objects deemed relevant, those believed to have the ability to tell a particular aspect of the Holocaust story. Between 1996 and the opening of the IWM Holocaust exhibition in 2000, HEPO constructed a narrative and secured artefacts that could best illustrate this harrowing story to the visiting public.

According to an appeal for material circulated among the Holocaust survivor community in Britain, the IWM believed the deployment of 'authentic historical evidence' to be a 'vital component of an exhibition on this theme.'<sup>145</sup> Showcases were to offer 'an abundance of original material, documents, objects, posters, cartoons, paintings, pamphlets and newspapers – much of which', it was claimed, 'will not have been displayed in Britain before.' While HEPO had started a process of collecting from the museum's own archive, the IWM wished to 'provide a balanced picture of events across Europe,'<sup>146</sup> thus were carrying out a major acquisitions programme. This was an unusual practice for the IWM as most exhibitions are created around the museum's existing holdings. This is perhaps an indication of the value of the narrative above the artefacts that would eventually be displayed. The programme directly targeted survivors and their families residing in Britain as well as conducting a search of archives and institutions abroad. HEPO was predominantly hoping to secure permanent ownership of such items but were willing to negotiate on loans, particularly on rarer items. The audience to which the IWM's appeal was directed provides an indication of how they were, at this early stage, defining the Holocaust. The appeal was directed at survivors of the Nazi camps, people who, as children,

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<sup>144</sup> Suzanne Bardgett, "Holocaust Exhibition," *Report: Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition*, (Winter 1996/1997): 3

<sup>145</sup> Press notice Holocaust exhibition: appeal for material for display, April, 1996, Acquisitions File, Holocaust Exhibition Archive, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>146</sup> Press notice Holocaust exhibition: appeal for material for display, April, 1996.

fled Nazi Germany and came to Britain via the Kindertransport arrangements, and civilians and former servicemen whose personal experience during the Second World War impinged on, or was affected by, the plight of the Jews of Europe.<sup>147</sup> While the Holocaust exhibition was to be the first permanent exhibition within the IWM to focus solely on the experience of the Jews during the Holocaust, it was clear from the early stages this was attempting to take a specifically British angle. As will be discussed in greater detail throughout Chapter Three, the process of material selection for the exhibition was to be incredibly strict, even limiting. When selecting potential material for inclusion within the exhibition all members of HEPO were to ask a series of questions. Firstly, is it relevant? Presumably this means is it relevant to the story constructed by the IWM. Only those items that fitted with the prescribed narrative would be deemed 'relevant.' The result, of course, was that significant, albeit obscure, artefacts were passed over; what would happen to these? Secondly, HEPO were advised to question whether the object had visual interest; a document with accompanying pictures was preferred over a document that was entirely text based. This is understandable, particularly as very few texts would be written in English (resulting in lengthy translation text panels; not ideal in practical terms). We should, however, question how limiting this is. To discard crucial documents in this manner undoubtedly impacts upon the kinds of 'evidence' collected by the museum. For the textual documents, there was hope of its inclusion if it had 'at least elements – recognisable terms or names, coloured stamps, emblems – which [would] give the visitor some point of reference to it.'<sup>148</sup> This offers an indication the story would be dictated by pre-existing, or familiar, Holocaust narratives. Thirdly, HEPO were to question whether the history the artefact represented was 'so complicated and/or unrepresentative that it would be unlikely to be included in the display for fear of seeming incongruous or of diverting from the main story?'<sup>149</sup> HEPO were reminded by Suzanne Bardgett that the nature of what was being documented meant 'much of what is collected will need to be representative of what happened to masses of people. Isolated incidents – particularly if they are atypical – will tend to jar somewhat.'<sup>150</sup> HEPO sought to construct an exhibition that ironed out the complexities, arguably the individuality, of Holocaust stories to create an overarching master narrative. The USHMM

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<sup>147</sup> Press notice Holocaust exhibition: appeal for material for display, April, 1996.

<sup>148</sup> Researching Material for the Holocaust Exhibition: Selecting and recording material in other archives/museums, IWM Holocaust Exhibition Project Office, Acquisitions File, Holocaust Exhibition Archive, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>149</sup> Researching Material for the Holocaust Exhibition: Selecting and recording material in other archives/museums, IWM Holocaust Exhibition Project Office

<sup>150</sup> Researching Material for the Holocaust Exhibition: Selecting and recording material in other archives/museums, IWM Holocaust Exhibition Project Office

was to be a 'benchmark' for the IWMHE design; HEPO were encouraged to view it and 'analyse its strengths and weaknesses and its key lessons for London.'<sup>151</sup> The IWM intended to create a full historical exhibition documenting the Holocaust based on scholarly and popular cultural representations, but, importantly, this was not expected to break new ground; the audience would not receive new insights into Holocaust history through the exhibition.

From an assessment of the development of the IWMHE it is clear there were many tensions in, firstly, bringing the Holocaust to the IWM and, secondly, in designing a permanent Holocaust exhibition that could work within the confines of the museum. Along with a need to fit within the museum's remit, there were pressures to narrate a history that would adhere to popular narratives. In line with previous IWM exhibitions the museum would reinforce accepted interpretations, resulting in the perpetuation of familiar narratives, images and objects. The opening of the USHMM provided the IWM with the confidence needed to tackle the theme of the Holocaust and genocide within its own displays. It was clear if they did not undertake this task, then another institution would as the time was right for Britain to create a museum dedicated to a history of the Holocaust. While the framing would be different to the USHMM – presented within the narrative structure of Britain at war – the end result would be a small-scale replica of the Holocaust museum in Washington, DC. Rather than taking the lead in educating the public, the IWMHE largely confirmed what a large proportion of its visitors already knew; displayed for the first time in Britain in object form.

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<sup>151</sup> Stephen Greenberg, DEGW Holocaust Exhibition Second Design Submission, undated, Exhibition Design File, Holocaust Exhibition Archive, Imperial War Museum, London.

**The Holocaust in Pictures: Photographs, Narrative, Memory and Identity in the Museum**

This chapter relies on the assumption readers will understand what is meant by the term 'Holocaust photograph'. On analysis of the photographic collection on display within the IWMHE, consisting of over 400 photographs (excluding archived material), it became apparent there is no obvious inclusive definition of what makes a photograph a 'Holocaust photograph'. This chapter considers how the Holocaust is presented and defined within the IWMHE through the photographic displays and explores themes of memory and identity as they emerge through interpretations of the photographic material.

Susan Sontag argues, strictly speaking,

one never understands anything from a photograph. Of course, photographs fill in blanks in our mental pictures of the present and the past [...] Nevertheless, the camera's rendering of reality must always hide more than it discloses.<sup>152</sup>

The IWMHE relies heavily on photographs to depict a narrative history of the Holocaust. When collecting for the exhibition began in 1996, Holocaust exhibition director, Suzanne Bardgett discussed the existence of 'plenty of "flat evidence" in terms of documents, film and photographs relating to Nazi Europe'<sup>153</sup> already held within the Imperial War Museum's archive (set against the relative lack of three-dimensional objects). Photographs were always to be an integral part of the final exhibition. What has become known as the Holocaust in Britain and elsewhere is one of the most visually documented events of the last century. In terms of historical 'evidence', this means the availability of images relating to the Nazi persecution and annihilation of Europe's Jews, and others, are in their millions. Entire actions carried out by the Nazis and their collaborators have been documented in photographic form and these have been reconstructed for future audiences through a number of memorials, museums and exhibitions (both temporary and permanent). Photographs were taken by perpetrators while crimes were committed and by victims in acts of resistance, with images taken at the liberation of the camps responsible for opening up broad public interest in Nazi crimes. These images are responsible for shaping early collective imaginings of the Holocaust; images taken of survivors behind fences, starving prisoners in barracks and the masses of anonymous corpses. The motivations of photographers at liberation were to act as witness to the atrocities carried out, but these varied in style and emphasis; ultimately affecting how such photographs would be used in future acts of witnessing. Carol Zemel argues,

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<sup>152</sup>Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin, 1979), 23.

<sup>153</sup>Bardgett, "The Material Culture of Persecution," 23.

most images of the Holocaust were made at liberation by Allied forces – American, British, Russian. The act of witness was central to their mission, but the pictures vary significantly in their designs and emphases. Military file photographs, for example, often took a longer or broader view, showing camp grounds strewn with bodies as liberating armies discharged their work. Journalists' pictures, in contrast, were usually part of some narrative report or story. Like Miller's picture of a dead SS guard floating in a canal, they often came closer to their human subjects, whether suffering prisoner, camp guard, or tangled corpse.<sup>154</sup>

Whether most photographs were taken at liberation is disputable, though these can certainly be credited with reaching a mass audience in far greater numbers than other Holocaust photographs at the time. The liberation photographs had an original purpose, they were necessarily selective and contextualised in the moment they were captured. The use of these photographs in subsequent displays, even those seemingly remaining true to the original narrative, radically distorts the events depicted by unavoidably overemphasising that which is pictured. For every photograph captured of a moment in time, several more could be taken to alter the perspective of the viewer. In pictures originally taken for journalistic purposes, by choosing to focus on a particular subject, the aim was to personalise a narrative constructed by journalists such as American war correspondent, Lee Miller. These photographs were taken with a purpose that reaches beyond simply documenting events as they happened, yet their original contexts are neglected from displays (with exception to exhibitions focused around the journalists themselves, such as the Lee Miller exhibition). This is an important point in understanding how the decontextualisation of a photograph, or series of photographs, affects audience perceptions of the displays. Photographs, it is argued here, cannot speak for themselves but must be interpreted. How they are interpreted within the IWMHE reveals vital clues on the purpose the Holocaust serves within this specific institution as a national response and, thus, Holocaust discourse within British society more broadly.

This chapter explores the selection and display of Holocaust photographs within the IWMHE. How do the photographs contribute towards the construction of a Holocaust story that both shapes and reaffirms a collective memory of the Holocaust in Britain? And how is the Holocaust actively remembered within the IWMHE through the photographic selection? Here the relationship between narrative and Holocaust photography is explored as we consider how photographs of the past shape how the Holocaust is remembered today. The relationship between the selected photographs and the Holocaust narrative

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<sup>154</sup> Carol Zemel, "Emblems of Atrocity: Holocaust Liberation Photographs," in *Image and Remembrance: Representation and the Holocaust*, ed. Shelley Hornstein and Florence Jacobowitz (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 205-206.

presented within the IWMHE is explored to gain further insight into the values and beliefs that underpin these selections. This allows us to consider how a sense of Britishness is constructed through photographs. How, for example, is British national identity expressed or reflected through the photographic selections?

Hannah Holtschneider argues photographs are used within the IWMHE to support the storyline. They are not, she argues, 'viewed as artefacts that need to be contextualized in order to be intelligible.'<sup>155</sup> Rather than acting as contestable historical evidence within their own right, photographs are used as mere illustration of a master narrative imposed by the exhibition. As a result, Holtschneider argues, 'their meaning is clarified for the visitor before he or she has seen a single image.'<sup>156</sup> The visitor is already aware before encountering each individual photograph of how the images within the exhibition should be read, even those images that are not immediately recognisable as 'belonging' to the Holocaust. This supports the argument that images viewed in a museum context may, in fact, gain their 'cultural currency' from outside contexts.<sup>157</sup> The first photographs visitors encounter within the IWMHE are displayed on a birch wood wall in the entrance cone to the exhibition [see Illustration Two]. They depict several domestic scenes; friends gathered around a table and what is seemingly a mother and daughter outside of an apartment block. None of the photographs are captioned, the visitor is left to speculate on the scenes. The photographic display relies on the visitors' prior understanding of the use, purpose and display of family photographs. In private photographs, the subjects present themselves in a way they wish to be viewed and remembered. As Elizabeth Harvey and Maiken Umbach argue, taking a picture is 'an act of asserting control or authority over the moment and over how that moment will be remembered in the future.'<sup>158</sup> Most of the photographs displayed within the IWMHE are taken from the perspective of the perpetrator. This first photographic display of the exhibition (along with a handful of other examples littered throughout) offers an opportunity for visitors to view the victims in a way they actively chose to be remembered. What sets this apart from a family photograph album, however, is context. In narrative terms, at this point in the exhibition those depicted in the family photographs

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<sup>155</sup> Holtschneider, *The Holocaust and Representations of Jews*, , 60.

<sup>156</sup> Holtschneider, *The Holocaust and Representations of Jews*, 76.

<sup>157</sup> Paul Williams, *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities* (Oxford: Berg, 2007), 51.

<sup>158</sup> Elizabeth Harvey and Maiken Umbach, "Introduction: Photography and Twentieth-Century German History," *Central European History* 48, no. 3 (September 2015): 292

Illustration Two: Entrance cone to the Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition, *image author's own*





have not yet become victims of Nazi brutality. The viewer witnesses the decontextualised photographs very differently to the subjects' original intentions.

The IWMHE orientates the visitor to emphasise the 'ordinariness' of the lives depicted. The only photograph displayed in this first section likely to appear different to those of the visitors' own collections is an image of Orthodox Jews. The inclusion of the photograph of Orthodox Jews succeeds in presenting the people on the birch wood wall as familiar but somehow different. This is an introduction to an exhibition explicitly embracing difference, though not unproblematically as shall be discussed in more detail in Chapter Five. The photographs jar in a way the majority of visitors' family photographs do not. Firstly, they are read in terms of their context in an exhibition of the Holocaust; a concept most visitors to the exhibition will be aware of. In opposition to the familiar display of photographs depicting family life within visitors' own homes, the photographs displayed within the entrance to the IWMHE are marked with persecution, death and destruction. This, arguably, creates an emotional response within the visitor, both to this one display and to the exhibition ahead. The visitor is viewing the photograph because its subject has (in all probability) died and it is thought there are lessons to be learnt in the detail of these deaths. Visitors, however, are not informed of the individual fates of those depicted within the entrance cone because, in a sense, this is not deemed important for the story. For the purpose of the Holocaust exhibition, it is not entirely necessary, or indeed favourable, to know the fates of these individuals as the photographs act to create an atmosphere of foreboding; not knowing their fates increases the tension at the exhibition's beginning (attesting to its performative function). The photographs here are representative of all victims of the Holocaust and, thus, their faces act as the faces of many.

Family photographs work to trigger personal narratives that are shared between friends and family. People often look through family photograph albums and reminisce over old family stories, or about activities with friends. Photographs offer an opening for dialogue, from which we learn about the people and events depicted; rarely do we gain such insights from the images alone. In contrast, the photographs presented at the entrance to the Holocaust exhibition remain largely detached from personal narratives, signifying severed family ties and whole worlds lost. By excluding family narratives, or explanatory captions, from this section, the IWMHE make a clear statement of irretrievable loss; a technique emphasising destruction over the richness of Jewish life and culture. While it may be impossible to provide captions for the photographs displayed (there is no evidence to

suggest the IWM hold this information), photographs with accompanying narratives could have been selected in place (many are in existence). The IWMHE curatorial team made a conscious decision to reject captions and family narratives, which is revealing of their design intentions to represent masses of victims rather than multiple complex narratives. The context of these photographs within the entrance cone to the IWMHE have provided them with a new role beyond the purpose for which the photographs were originally captured, that of bearing witness 'to the completeness of the destruction waged by the Holocaust.'<sup>159</sup>

There are a number of issues raised through the decontextualisation of photographs displayed within the IWMHE. Firstly, their connection to Britain and the Holocaust is strained and the uses to which they have been put demands further investigation. According to IWMHE designer, Bob Baxter, 'Britishness was a big deal' for the exhibition. British speaking survivors were chosen for the final display to make it easier for visitors to relate to their stories, and the opening cone of the exhibition was designed to show western Europeans 'that would make visitors to the exhibition realise that these were people just like us.'<sup>160</sup> The designers sought photographs of holidays, special occasions and family portraits so that visitors could identify and relate to victims of Nazi atrocities. While this was an explicit aim of designers, why visitors should identify with the victims and what this could achieve was given little thought. The IWMHE designers believed the Holocaust would not travel, that is, while Britain was undoubtedly connected to the events occurring throughout occupied Europe, the crimes were not committed on (mainland) British soil. Though this appeared only to matter in terms of materiality as photographs were excluded from this logic. The designers were against the idea of recreating any scenes of the Holocaust; the watchtowers, barbed wire fences and railway tracks, they felt, 'belonged to Auschwitz'.<sup>161</sup> Photographs, however, did not appear to present the same issues for the team. Photographs feature throughout the exhibition with seemingly little regard for the possible stories and interpretations they could offer.

Despite a brief to anchor the Holocaust exhibition within a British framework, HEPO actively sought photographs from archives and agencies abroad in a bid to redress the imbalance of the IWM archive. That photographs would be recontextualised within a British framework, to say something of British identity, is an important observation. The

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<sup>159</sup> Holtschneider, *The Holocaust and Representations of Jews*, 59.

<sup>160</sup> Bob Baxter, in conversation with the author, January 8, 2015, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>161</sup> Baxter, in conversation with the author, January 8, 2015.

IWM already held a rich collection of photographs that were related to the Holocaust period prior to the planning of a permanent Holocaust exhibition, many of which had been used as the basis of an earlier exhibition on the liberation of Belsen (focusing attention on the liberators and medical staff rather than on the perpetrator or victim groups).

Photographs, as with objects, are powerful in the sense they appear to present a past as it was, their truth claims displayed as self-evident. Elizabeth Edwards and Sigrid Lien highlight Daniel Miller's research on material culture within their study on museums and the work of photographs. As Daniel Miller has argued, they highlight, 'the less we are aware of them [things/photographs], the more powerfully they can determine our expectations by setting the scene and ensuring normative behaviours, without being open to challenge. They determine what takes place to the extent that we are unconscious of their capacity to do so.' In other words, Edwards and Lien state, 'arguably things are at their most powerful when they are *not* noticed.'<sup>162</sup> Raphael Sassower and Louis Cicotello argue within their study of war images, '*iconic images* seem to tell a story directly and simply' [emphasis in original]. Iconic images, they stress, are believed to speak for themselves as everyone *knows* what they are about – there is no need for lengthy explanations as people have been conditioned to 'understand' them.<sup>163</sup> John Taylor supports this in stating how, even though photographs are often printed in black and white, 'they are widely accepted as standing in for the real thing. They are taken as objective records, different from experience but none the less anchored in the real world.'<sup>164</sup> Photographs are presented within the IWMHE as objective record of that past, despite the questionable provenance of some. Visitors are not encouraged to view the photographs with any critical reflection. As visitors move through pictorial renditions of the rise of the Nazis they are confronted with multiple images of Hitler alongside images of vandalised Jewish shops. This convincingly sets up a dichotomy between victim and perpetrator, which becomes crystallised as visitors move through the exhibition.

The IWMHE initiates a simplistic reading of the Holocaust as it constructs a master narrative with clear perpetrators (thus denying the visitor a chance to engage with what the term perpetrator means) and clear victims. The aim to present victims as 'just like us'

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<sup>162</sup> Elizabeth Edwards and Sigrid Lien, "Introduction: Museums and the Work of Photographs," in *Uncertain Images: Museums and the Work of Photographs*, ed. Elizabeth Edwards and Sigrid Lien (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 4.

<sup>163</sup> Raphael Sassower and Louis Cicotello, *War Images: Fabricating Reality* (Lanham, MA: Lexington Books, 2010), 42.

<sup>164</sup> John Taylor, *War Photography: Realism in the British Press* (London: Routledge, 1991), 1.

supports a discourse that seemingly embraces difference (by saying we are all different and, thus, all the same) but acts to mask individuality in an attempt to foster social cohesion. Visitors to the exhibition identify with the victims only through an identification with their humanity, there is little opportunity to engage with the lives of individual victims to enable a deeper identification beyond empathy for their plight.

The Holocaust story in Britain is used as a source of pride. Hitler is illuminated as the ultimate villain in a narrative championing the simplistic binary opposition of good versus evil. This structure is neither helpful for any 'lessons' the Holocaust may hope to teach, nor is it useful in critically examining what must be considered a complex and contentious past. What lessons can be deduced from a past that fails to engage with anything beyond a limiting narrative template in which Britain remains heroic against the Nazi enemy? How are future citizens able to question their own actions, or inactions, in relation to events of over seventy years ago? The danger here is that the Holocaust becomes reduced to a fable, which becomes even less connected to the real as time passes. In order to avoid this, the Holocaust and its memory must be continually subjected to critical analysis, to develop new narratives based on new evidence rather than to settle for a familiar and, by now, easily identifiable Holocaust story. As the historian Sybil Milton has written, '[a]lthough more than two million photos exist in the public archives of more than twenty nations, the quality, scope and content of the images reproduced in scholarly and popular literature has been very repetitive.'<sup>165</sup> In response, Marianne Hirsch has questioned why, 'with so much imagery available from the time, has the visual landscape of the Holocaust and thus our opportunity for historical understanding been so radically delimited?'<sup>166</sup>

Our cultural memory of the Holocaust is shaped in part by the photographs displayed in exhibitions such as the IWMHE. As Judith Keilbach identifies,

If we assume the number of available pictures to be several million, the repertory of pictures that we can recall is comparatively small. Repeatedly we remember the same pictures because they have been continuously reproduced and recycled in film and literature. The reasons these pictures are continuously repeated can be found in their availability, their aesthetic quality, and the motifs shown, as well as

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<sup>165</sup>Sybil Milton cited in Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 8.

<sup>166</sup>Marianne Hirsch, "Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory," in *Visual Culture and the Holocaust*, ed. Barbie Zelizer (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 222.

in the fact that they permit adaptation to the relevant interpretation of the incident.<sup>167</sup>

IWMHE designer, Bob Baxter claimed photographs were chosen for the exhibition for their graphic quality. Baxter discussed workshops carried out by himself with input from HEPO. Several photographs would be chosen for their 'ability to narrate the Holocaust.' The photographs, Baxter stated, were always to be of 'vital importance' to an exhibition that would inevitably be 'light on artefacts.'<sup>168</sup> This reveals an underlying belief of the designers that photographs would not be considered artefacts in their own right. Photographs would be used to narrate a story, providing the 'evidence' that traditionally objects would do in a museum display, with little reflection on the problems inherent in re-presenting decontextualised photographic documents. What does a photograph of Leon Trotsky addressing demonstrators in Red Square, Moscow in October 1921, for example, actually contribute to our understanding of the Holocaust? The photographic caption informs us:

Trotsky was, with Lenin and Stalin, one of the three main Bolshevik (Communist) leaders of the Soviet Union. Because of his Jewish origins, he was singled out as 'proof' that the Communist movement was 'controlled by the Jews'.

This photograph offers little to the linear historical narrative of the exhibition but is, in fact, in danger of reproducing simplistic generalisations. This display has the potential to reproduce old stereotypes by offering little, if any, contextual information. As this photograph and caption reveals, photographs are able to act as 'proof' of various possibilities.

IWMHE designer, Bob Baxter was clear in stating the exhibition never intended to 'reconstruct' the Holocaust through 'film set' type scenery. The Holocaust, Baxter claimed, 'does not travel'. In other words, Baxter believed that Holocaust scenes belonged in 'authentic' sites of Holocaust history and memory, such as Auschwitz. This, Baxter felt, could not be transported to London and so it would be the purpose of the IWMHE to narrate an overview of Holocaust history in the same way as a text book could, rather than attempt to bring the Holocaust to London as an immersive experience. Despite the designers' intentions, however, Holtschneider discusses the effect of using photographs in the manner they have within the IWMHE,

Far from being treated as historical source material, which needs contextualization in order to become intelligible to the viewer, the effect here is that of a film set.

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<sup>167</sup> Judith Keilbach, "Photographs, Symbolic Images, and the Holocaust: On the (Im)possibility of Depicting Historical Truth," *History and Theory* 48, No. 2 (May 2009): 55.

<sup>168</sup> Bob Baxter in conversation with author, January 8 2015.

Rather than asking visitors to engage actively with historical material, the IWMHE makes visitors into passive consumers of a historical drama that needs to be experienced in toto and without critical distance to its emplotment.<sup>169</sup>

Visitors to the IWMHE are introduced to three key groups within the master narrative. Firstly, the victims of the Holocaust are identified within the entrance cone of the exhibition. Secondly, visitors are confronted with those responsible for the Holocaust, the perpetrators. And, thirdly, visitors are introduced to the Allied forces as they brought images of horror to the world in 1945, offering the building blocks upon which Britain could remember a just and honourable war, the liberators. As the story of the Holocaust is largely supported through the photographic account within the IWMHE, it is useful to assess the ways in which 'victims,' 'perpetrators,' and 'liberators' are represented within the displays, and also to understand how the exhibition is punctuated through the display of personal stories; mini narratives accompanied by a photograph detailing the experience of an individual or group at various intervals in the Holocaust story.

#### Photographs of 'Victims' within the Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition

As stated by Hannah Holtschneider in a discussion of the IWMHE,

Photographs play an important part in this musealisation of the Holocaust, functioning as evidence and illustration. Photo murals dominate entire walls and the background of display cases, setting the tone and creating the atmosphere, communicating that 'this has been'. Photos represent both the victims before they became victims and their dehumanization and murder. According to the curators, photographs are supposed to bring home 'the truth' or 'the reality' of the process of persecution and murder.<sup>170</sup>

The IWMHE presents a perpetrator-led perspective throughout the displays.<sup>171</sup> As a result, those who are identified as victims from the very beginning of the exhibition (within the entrance cone) are denied an opportunity to appear on their own terms. The narrative limits their experiences to events out of their own control. Rather than understanding the Holocaust from the perspective of Jewish and other victims, the narrative dictates visitors understand the Holocaust from the perspective of those perpetrating the crimes. In an attempt to explain how and why these things happened, the exhibition chooses to focus on the 'Nazi machinery', with victims becoming marginalised within the plot. The victims in this sense become illustrative of the 'brutality' of the perpetrators but their individual

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<sup>169</sup>Holtschneider, *The Holocaust and Representations of Jews*, 64-65.

<sup>170</sup>Hannah Holtschneider, "Are Holocaust Victims Jewish? Looking at Photographs in the Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition," *Melilah: Manchester Journal of Jewish Studies* Supplement 1 (2012): 97.

<sup>171</sup>This is discussed in detail within Holtschneider, *The Holocaust and Representations of Jews*.

stories are not considered important in themselves. The presentation of victims within the exhibition allows the visitor to witness the consequences of Nazi policies and provides the human implications of persecution. This approach, however, disallows contextualisation as seemingly unconnected stories are brought together for the purpose of coherence. The result is the decontextualisation of photographs and their accompanying narratives.<sup>172</sup> Rather than an engagement with photographs as source material, they are considered to offer an unmediated truth – a re-presentation of, or window onto, the past. Little space is given to allow for alternative readings. This is evident, particularly, within the ghetto section of the IWMHE, where photographs are used to create a sense of the daily conditions for the Jewish inhabitants. Photographs depict living and working conditions in various ghettos with little discussion of the differing locations and experiences. Ghettos become conflated to a unified ghetto experience; visitors witness a child in a cap leaning against a wall, a woman carrying a child, a group of starving children, an old man pushing a pram with a small child beside, and a child on a step begging. While these are powerful and emotive images, they cannot speak for themselves. Visitors are given an overall sense of ghetto conditions but this is far removed from educating the public on this aspect of Holocaust history. The ghetto concept did not emerge through Nazism, and this is obscured through the IWM's approach to representation.

The perpetrator-led narrative is clearly identifiable through the photographic display within the IWMHE. These images determine what the Nazi (and collaborator) perpetrators did to the Jewish and other victims, exerting a strong emphasis on victimhood above individual agency. As a result of this layout, the visitor is only able to engage with personal narratives at prescribed points, when the curators and designers inject personal narratives into the overarching master narrative. Unable to connect to personal narratives at other points within the exhibition restricts visitors' interpretation as the images are forced to conform to a broader narrative template. Personal stories, which are accompanied by photographs of individuals, were researched by the curatorial team and included on the basis of their illustration of the exhibition's master narrative. This is restrictive as, rather than taking the opportunity to explore previously unheard narratives that had the potential to alter perspectives and educate visitors, the team rejected those stories that jarred or in any way

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<sup>172</sup> According to Bob Baxter, in conversation with the author, January 8, 2015, photographs were acquired by the IWMHE with narrative descriptors included, narratives were literally transplanted from one context to another. This reveals an underlying assumption that photographs are witnesses to the past rather than representation of it. This does not consider how the same photograph can be used to say many things and also shows little consideration for how photographs interact with their locality.

confused the linear historical narrative prescribed.<sup>173</sup> Here questions are raised of how helpful such a narrative is and what lessons can be taken from such a restrictive interpretation.

### *The First Victims of Nazism*

Beginning on the upper floor, passing through the entrance cone filled with family photographs, the next opportunity the visitor has to see victims in photographic form is in the fourth section of the exhibition, *The Nazis Take Power*. Here rows of men in striped uniforms are visible next to the caption 'A roll-call at Dachau, the first SS camp, which served as a model for future camps. Prisoners were often made to stand on the parade ground for hours.' Dachau functioned from 1933 as an instrument of terror against any who would oppose the Nazi regime, it has been described within popular narratives as a 'school of terror', the training grounds of the SS where techniques of brutality and torture were perfected.<sup>174</sup> In narrative terms the photograph of prisoners standing for a roll call precedes a section on anti-Semitism, however in practical terms the visitor arrives at a recess displaying Jewish simulacra alongside an audio-visual installation showing a video on the history of anti-Semitism before being confronted with the prisoners in striped uniform. There is no indication of who the prisoners are and why they have been imprisoned, therefore a logical conclusion for visitors to reach is to assume the prisoners are detained for being Jewish. Having been introduced to the Jewish victims at the beginning of the exhibition and to move through a section on the rise of Nazism, there has been no mention of other victims to indicate the prisoners photographed are, in fact, political opponents of the Nazis. From this, visitors connect the plight of the Jewish people with Dachau (or concentration camps more broadly) as early as 1933. The camp at Dachau was initially designed to 'neutralise' opponents of the Nazi regime,<sup>175</sup> as such, places were largely reserved for political prisoners and trade unionists. Jews were interned where they fell into the category of political prisoner at this stage in the camp's history, not simply for being Jewish. Aware, however, of what images of prisoners in striped uniforms would evoke in the visitors' imaginations, the photograph of prisoners at Dachau during a roll call is

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<sup>173</sup> Researching Material for the Holocaust Exhibition: Selecting and recording material in other archives/museums, IWM Holocaust Exhibition Project Office, Acquisitions File, Holocaust Exhibition Archive, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>174</sup> Within Lawrence Rees' documentary, *The Nazis: A Warning from History* (1997), an influential documentary on the design of the IWMHE, and within the Dachau Concentration Camp Memorial Site.

<sup>175</sup> Harold Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau: The Uses and Abuses of a Concentration Camp, 1933-2001* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 3.



arguably reduced to a simplistic representation of the Nazi progression towards Auschwitz and the extermination of the Jews. The later camp system is presented as a consequence of this earlier model.

### *Atrocity Photographs*

Suzanne Bardgett has spoken of frequent discussions regarding the ethics of showing certain images within the IWMHE. There were mixed reactions, she claims,

to the suggestion that two horrific photographs of women who had been raped in the Baltic states should be blown up almost to life size. Was it right to show these women in states of utter terror? They had lived lives like us, and now would be seen by thousands of visitors on a 'day-out in London' at a moment of terrifying humiliation. 'But this shows what happened' 'We must not censor the truth' came the reply from the team.<sup>176</sup>

Bardgett's claim to truth within this statement is indicative of the museum's approach to photographs within the Holocaust exhibition, photographs appear as evidence of the claims of the museum. It should be noted here, however, that the photograph does not depict women raped in the Baltic States but is, in fact, a photograph taken in the Ukraine. There is a belief in the documentary value of photographs, a suggestion they can reveal a truth about the past as it happened. Photography can help naturalise the Holocaust narratives presented, that is, leave the truth claims of the exhibition unchallengeable. Thought of in this way, photographs create a new universal language through which visitors grasp complex ideas and concepts in a short space of time. What is questionable, however, is exactly what visitors are taking from the photographs. Images are far easier to misinterpret than words, but it is also easier to construct an impressionable narrative through pictures. When photographs appear without captions, or with very limited text (as is the case for the enlarged photograph of the women raped in the Baltic States discussed above) they are considered able to speak for themselves. This is never the case, meaning is always derived from the context in this situation. Here the context provides meaning for the photograph rather than an explicit interpretation while other photographs are provided with captions or more obviously placed within specific ideological or communicative frameworks (as part of a collection, for example).

The question of why such images are shown should be considered, particularly when a number of organisations educate on the Holocaust without engaging with atrocity material

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<sup>176</sup> Suzanne Bardgett, in conversation with author, February 10, 2015.

at all.<sup>177</sup> To exclude atrocity images does not equate to a censoring of truth but offers an alternative approach to viewing and understanding the Holocaust. To represent what was lost rather than the human violation is just as valid, and one that rejects a re-presentation of the original humiliation suffered. Atrocity images are undoubtedly a part of the Holocaust story, and it is difficult to envision a Holocaust museum without them. However a reappraisal of *how* they are used is long overdue given the now ubiquitous nature of the Holocaust in public consciousness. It is beyond the scope of this study to assess exactly what visitors learn or engage from atrocity images, however it can question the assumptions upon which such images are selected.

The photographs of rape Bardgett refers to appear within the IWMHE on the lower ground within the Invasion of the Soviet Union section, which marks the movement from 'Nazi fanaticism' to 'systematic mass murder'. The photographs cover a wall on the left-hand side as the visitor walks through the exhibition, having just passed through the invasion of Poland. The two photographs have been placed seamlessly across one wall, with the most striking and prominent part of the scene being the face of a victim of rape staring directly into the camera (and thus directly at the visitor) from a street in Lvov. The context for these photographs is provided within a subtext stating,

Many people greeted the Germans as liberators.

Under Soviet occupation millions of Ukrainians, Poles, Jews, Latvians, Lithuanians, and Estonians had been murdered or exiled to Siberia. Millions of Ukrainians had been deliberately starved to death by the Communist regime in the 1930s for resisting the state's collective farming policy.

Many people had cooperated with the regime, including some Jews, but anti-Semites blamed all Jews and singled them out for reprisals.

As the Soviets fled before the advancing Germans, pogroms – violent popular attacks – broke out against Jews.

The photographic caption accompanying the two enlarged photographs states,

Local antiseimites abuse Jewish women in the streets of Lvov. Dozens were murdered and women were raped. On 29-30 July, after the Germans had captured the city, 5,000 Jews were rounded up and massacred by the Ukrainian militia.

These photographs, particularly of the 'rape victim' staring straight towards the camera, have been reproduced in various formats for a variety of purposes. This image is available

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<sup>177</sup> The Holocaust Education Trust, for example, do not include atrocity images in any of their educational materials.

to a mass audience and has been put to a variety of uses. In February 1993, the same photograph appeared in *Time International* accompanying a story asking 'Is rape an inevitable – and marginal – part of war?'<sup>178</sup> [See Illustration Three] In the context of war in Bosnia, this story discusses rape as policy. The photograph is accompanied by the caption 'Tradition of atrocities: A Jewish girl raped by Ukrainians in Lvov, Poland, in 1945'. *Time International* published an apology two months later stating the date was in fact 1941, the caption was misleading, and that the subject of the photograph was less than clear. The photograph had been obtained from the Ghetto Fighters' House in Israel and its history remained somewhat 'murky'. Despite their best efforts, the magazine states, 'we have not been able to pin down exactly what situation the photograph portrays.' Their apology included a statement to clarify that, as well as misdating the photograph, they 'may well have conveyed a false impression.'<sup>179</sup> This episode highlights the complexity of any single photograph offering evidence to a particular narrative, and also conveys the difficulties in re-presenting decontextualised images where little (if anything) is known about their original context. Where photographs have been taken in moments of despair, more thought is needed on how such images are reproduced and the 'truths' they purport to tell.

Despite knowing very little of the actual content of the photograph, popular texts, including *Time International* and the IWMHE discuss its depiction of the rape of a Jewish woman on the streets of Lvov. Its widespread circulation may be in part due to the clarity it appears to offer – the woman appeals directly to the viewer as the photograph is taken face-on while an older woman pulls at her clothes in an attempt to cover her exposed body. Janina Struk has discussed how much of what the viewer draws from a photograph is educated guess work, not fact, often little knowledge is available on the actual circumstances.<sup>180</sup> The woman looks possibly afraid, possibly angry, is this directed at the events that have purportedly just occurred or is this at the photographer for capturing this moment of degradation? This is transferred to the museum visitor as the photograph is witnessed within the exhibition; perhaps depicting anger at the voyeuristic response of the photographer.

The 'murkiness' of this and accompanying photographs included in the IWMHE did little to dissuade the IWM from purchasing them from the BDK photographic agency in Berlin for

<sup>178</sup> Lance Morrow, "Is rape an inevitable – and marginal – part of war?" *Time International*, February 22, 1993, 58.

<sup>179</sup> Karsten Prager, "Wartime Atrocities," *Time International*, April 19, 1993, 12.

<sup>180</sup> See Janina Struk, *Photographing the Holocaust: Interpretations of The Evidence* (London: IB Tauris, 2004).

90 Deutschmarks each. For the purpose of the IWMHE, these photographs reveal ‘what happened’: Nazis were welcomed as liberators of the Soviet occupation. With Jews blamed for cooperation with the Soviets, violent attacks broke out against the Jewish population.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Bob Baxter, in conversation with the author, January 8, 2015.

Illustration Three: Jewish woman on the streets of Lvov, *image from Time International*, April 19, 1993, 12.



This chapter of the story within the IWMHE had been drafted before the acquisition of the photographs, the photographs were therefore purchased as illustration, irrefutable evidence that 'this had happened'.<sup>182</sup> The photographs, enlarged to almost life-size, reveal the torment and abuse targeted at the Jewish population; leading the visitor towards the mobile killing squads and actions against local Jewish populations by Nazis and their collaborators. Do the photographs give a better understanding of the events taking place in

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<sup>182</sup> Bob Baxter, in conversation with the author, January 8, 2015.

Lvov? Or rather, do they provide an indication of how we understand the Holocaust in the present? With representation of atrocity images comes a responsibility to the visitors exposed to such material, and a responsibility to the photograph's subjects. In 1939, as Struk argues, the National Socialists 'were fabricating perhaps their most chilling propaganda to date, by using atrocity images to justify the invasion of Poland.'<sup>183</sup> As the use of photographs to illustrate a historical narrative always has a present agenda, what are atrocity images used for today? In the context of the IWMHE, atrocity images are used to illustrate the barbarity and 'evil' of the Nazi enemy, to illustrate the nature of Britain's opponent during the Second World War. This acts to justify British actions and reaffirm Britain's status as the moral force restoring peace and freedom to a Nazi-dominated Europe. This seems a gross misuse of a woman in distress, her photograph enlarged to almost life-size in an attempt to communicate the 'greatness' of Britain to the visiting public.

#### Photographs of Perpetrators within the Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition

The IWMHE centralises on the persecution and destruction of Jews, with reference to other victim groups, by the Nazis and their collaborators. In order to tell this story, the exhibition has adopted a perpetrator-led perspective, which utilises the documents, chronology and explanatory devices of the perpetrator with very few exceptions.<sup>184</sup> In its definition of the Holocaust, the IWM focuses on how the Nazis 'aimed to destroy all the Jews of Europe'. It discusses how, 'for the first time in history, industrial methods were used for the mass extermination of a whole people.' The exhibition is an attempt to address why and how these things happened. The focus here is on the crimes committed against the victim groups, rather than on the experiences of the victims themselves. While it may be argued the inclusion of survivor testimony within the exhibition redresses an imbalance swayed in the favour of the perpetrator, this testimony is used to enhance the visitors' understanding of the master narrative (the human impact), which is perpetrator-led. As Hannah

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<sup>183</sup> Struk, *Photographing the Holocaust*, 31.

<sup>184</sup> An exception to this is the entrance cone, within which family photographs, personal pictures and two a/v monitors displaying those later identified as victims in films *The way we were* and *The way we lived*. Arguably, however, this may be considered perpetrator-led as the images are displayed to illustrate what was lost – through the Holocaust – rather than a presentations of the lives lived before the Holocaust. This narrative of a culture lost is reinforced through two further a/v monitors situated within the entrance cone, *Under the cover of war*, which presents a film of tanks rolling across the countryside and devastated towns, and *Discovery*, which presents liberation footage of Belsen. Victims are presented within the context of the crimes committed against them.

Holtschneider has stated, 'The intention of the IWM exhibition is to tell the story of destruction and not to talk about what was destroyed.'<sup>185</sup>

In relation to the study of victims of the Holocaust, little research has been carried out on the representation of the perpetrators. This is surprising given the narratives constructed (through museums, films, literature and other popular representations) often rely heavily on perpetrator sources and timelines. Engagement with perpetrators is neglected, which severely inhibits understanding of the Holocaust, and certainly raises questions over what 'lessons' the Holocaust claims to offer. In exploring the story of the Holocaust as it is told by the IWMHE, it seems pertinent to address a central character in the plot in an attempt to better understand constructions of the perpetrator within the museum.

After the entrance cone, the IWMHE begins its narrative of the Holocaust in *Europe after the First World War*. This section details the political environment of Europe as an explanatory framework for the emergence of the Nazi party. Hitler is seen as a key aspect of this narrative with a section dedicated to *The Rise of Adolf Hitler*. This section is dominated by images and sounds of Hitler, emerging as leader of the National Socialist movement in Germany. The first eight images of perpetrators confronting the visitor are all of Hitler, attesting to his central role in the master narrative. This becomes a story in which Hitler is responsible for the Nazi party, who are responsible for the Holocaust. Hitler becomes the ultimate villain within the plot, which defies Holocaust historiography in locating 'ordinary' men and women as culpable perpetrators and simplifies the complex systems of power and collaboration that are vital to an understanding of the Holocaust. Here events are largely driven by one man, which risks elevating his status to 'the evil incarnate.'<sup>186</sup> While the IWMHE does identify other perpetrators - particularly within the section *Who Were the Killers* - they are certainly not afforded the prominence Hitler is.

Suzanne Bardgett stated that each item shown 'would support the narrative above all, history would take priority over design.' The result, she claimed, 'would produce an exhibition in which the visitor interacted directly with the raw historical evidence'.<sup>187</sup> This historical evidence, however, should not be considered 'raw' in the sense intended by Bardgett.

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<sup>185</sup> Holtschneider, "Are Holocaust victims Jewish?" 104.

<sup>186</sup> Klaus L. Berghahn and Jost Hermand, "Preface" in *Unmasking Hitler: Cultural Representations of Hitler from the Weimar Republic to the Present*, ed. Klaus L. Berghahn and Jost Hermand (Bern: Peter Lang, 2005), 7.

<sup>187</sup> Suzanne Bardgett, in conversation with author, February 10, 2015.

The photographs of perpetrators included within the IWMHE champion a very specific version of history. The narrative has been constructed to reflect certain elements of the presented past at the expense of others. The 'raw historical evidence' Bardgett refers to, therefore, is the result of a process of selection visitors are unaware of. To include a section dedicated to Hitler in the very beginning of the Exhibition, presenting eight large photographs in quick succession, encourages the visitor to consider Hitler the archetypal perpetrator, placing the Holocaust in a safe albeit wholly misinformed context. If photographs were, as Suzanne Bardgett claimed, to be the most memorable form of storytelling, then the image of Hitler is cemented within the minds of visitors from the very beginning and is likely to remain with them through to the conclusion. Visitors are able to comfortably distance themselves from the perpetrator, perpetuating an understanding of 'us' being on the side of 'good' against an 'evil' them (or him). No Holocaust victim is afforded such prominence within the exhibition, there is no archetypal victim, just a mass of (mainly western) Europeans 'like us'. In a sense, we never need to understand the victims in the same terms as the perpetrators if we are to know how and why the Holocaust happened (as is the exhibition's pedagogical aim). The victims remain a disparate group lacking agency as decisions were made on what would be done to them and how this would be implemented.

The imbalance in the narrative generated through the inclusion of excessive imagery of Hitler within the opening stages of the story is cause for concern given recent research on Holocaust education. The Institute of Education's Centre for Holocaust Education has published the results of a study finding that of over 8,000 secondary pupils surveyed, more than three-quarters believed Hitler and the Nazis to be solely responsible for the Holocaust.<sup>188</sup> Given the IWMHE's classroom presence (the IWM provides classroom resources and school groups are a large proportion of visitors' to the exhibition, discussed in greater length throughout Chapter Five), this is partial evidence of the influence such narratives assert. The exhibition cannot provide unmediated historical material, photographs cannot simply present truths, the choices of curators and designers impact on how the Holocaust is remembered and who remains central to the Holocaust story as it is told through the museum.

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<sup>188</sup> "Research Shows One Third of Pupils Hugely Underestimate Scale of the Holocaust," *Institute of Education Centre for Holocaust Education*, accessed February, 2015, <http://holocausteducation.org.uk>.



The 'killers' in this story of destruction are identified within the exhibition as Rudolf Hoess, Dr Mengele and Irma Grese; three infamous Nazi perpetrators. All are names the interested visitor will be familiar with and all have been subjected to media constructions prior to their arrival within the IWMHE. Their positioning a short walk from a large-scale model of Auschwitz-Birkenau is not in an obvious location as visitors are likely to pass by without notice. Consequently, it appears the 'killers' are unimportant in comparison to their crimes. While it is understandable the exhibition designers would not dedicate a great deal of time and space to the biographies of key individuals (this is largely an exhibition focusing on the process rather than the people, other than, it seems, Hitler), the consequence is the 'evil' behind the decisions remaining abstract. The importance of the perpetrators appears to be in their illustrative capacity and ability to provide a literal image of the antithesis of Britain and Britishness. There is, however, an inconsistency in the aims of this section. This element of the story aims to inform visitors of the 'ordinariness' of those involved in the killing process and yet, equally, sets them apart as 'sadistic' and 'blood thirsty'. The text accompanying the photographs of Hoess, Mengele and Grese, states,

Over 7,000 staff – officers, doctors, administrators and guards – served in the Auschwitz complex. These men and women came from many backgrounds. They included doctors, locksmiths, an accountant, a baker, a carpenter, a musical instrument maker, a bank clerk, a fireman, dentists and farm labourers.

Although those who requested transfer to other duties were regarded as weak, no one was forced to participate in the murder process. Those who did take part were moved by their belief in Nazi ideology, a misplaced desire to 'do a good job', the wish to avoid being sent to the front, and sadism or blood-lust.

Many of the perpetrators led double lives and did not discuss their work with their families. Others ignored SS orders and took pride in telling their relatives about the duties they performed in Germany's name.

This detail is provided alongside three wartime photographs of Hoess, Mengele and Grese – all of whom had performed duties at Auschwitz (and thus were high profile perpetrators after the war). Hoess is described as having carried out a 'brutal political murder in 1922', before joining the SS in 1930, using highly emotive and powerful language to convince the reader of his questionable character, which also reaffirms an image of Nazis as Other. Mengele's interest in 'biological and medical "purification" of society' is highlighted, connecting him to the racist ideology of the Nazis as a motive for his actions. This does, however, fail to connect him to the racial theory movements and widespread racist ideology circulating throughout Europe at the time; including Britain where it had substantial roots. Grese, the IWMHE display states, 'enjoyed inflicting pain on her charges

with a whip and a walking stick. She also shot prisoners and assisted with selections for the gas chambers.' All 'killers' are presented as inhumane, 'monstrous' individuals, supported by mug-shot style photographs highlighting their criminality. The photographs have been cropped to enhance the facial features, they appear harsh and unforgiving and their cruelty is easy for visitors to imagine. This approach excuses any self-reflection on the part of the visitor as perpetrators are elevated to an inhuman position.

Images of perpetrators also appear in the section dedicated to ghettos and in a room detailing the Nazi hierarchy prior to the deportation section. The final confrontation visitors have with the perpetrators is through the war crimes trials section. Here, a selection of high profile Nazi perpetrators are presented alongside their postwar biographies. The visitor is able to establish the postwar fates of Grese, Mengele and Hoess among Eichmann, Himmler, Goebbels and Hitler. This once again rejects a narrative of 'ordinary' Germans and their collaborators in favour of re-presenting familiar names and faces. Rather than enhancing Holocaust knowledge, this stagnates understanding and leads visitors to believe this is all there is to know.

#### Photographs of liberation within the Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition

The liberation of Nazi camps, Bergen-Belsen in particular, represents the IWM's point of entry into exhibiting the Holocaust through a dedicated exhibition. The story of the Holocaust had to fit within the remit of the IWM, which is to explore the human experience of war for Britain and the Commonwealth. Previous exhibitions within the IWM dealt with elements of the Holocaust, such as the liberation of Bergen-Belsen depicted through a selection of photographs largely taking the perspective of British medical personnel, however the permanent Holocaust exhibition intended to offer a full historical narrative of which Britain's role as liberator would make up only a marginal part. The narrative constructed throughout the exhibition supports a British narrative framework in which Britain emerges on the side of 'good', where, at the liberation of the camps, the soldiers (and the world through the media) learnt of the 'evil they helped to defeat'.<sup>189</sup> This acts as affirmation that Britain's efforts were worthwhile and, in a country weary from war, proof of the 'good war'; a narrative born out of hardship and loss.

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<sup>189</sup> Robert Crawford, "Foreword," in *IWM Holocaust Exhibition Guidebook* (London: IWM, 2006), 3.

Exhibition designer, Bob Baxter, intended the exhibition to illustrate that 'liberation' did not mark the end of the suffering.<sup>190</sup> Rather than liberation, the exhibition named the section dealing with the arrival of Allied forces to the camps 'Discovery', followed by a subsection on 'Relief Efforts'. Here visitors are confronted with a large-scale photograph of a British soldier bulldozing bodies in Belsen [see Illustration Four]. Suzanne Bardgett had reservations about the display of this photograph in this format:

Another decision not reached easily was to cover an entire wall with the photograph of the British soldier driving a bulldozer towards a mound of corpses of Belsen inmates. "That might be my mother/aunt/grandmother" was the reaction imagined from survivors or their families. I had severe reservations about showing that photograph so large. But others felt differently. As with the photos of the raped women, there was the consideration that by this stage the visitor would be immersed in the exhibition's story, and – one hoped – horrified and revolted.<sup>191</sup>

Bardgett predicts a revulsion of the visitor at the treatment of prisoners within the Nazi camps throughout occupied Europe, though this is a dubious intention. Bob Baxter claimed the designers had wanted to ensure visitors were aware that the liberation of the camps did not mark the end, but suffering was ongoing. This is an admirable aim as, for many popular presentations, liberation and the end of the war signals a close in the narrative; the dead are buried and survivors continue with their lives (or, for many, build new lives). This aim, however, is never fully realised within the exhibition as post war narratives, such as DP camps (an ideal opportunity to critically engage with Britain's relationship to the Holocaust), are excluded in favour of a reflective audio-visual display on the post-war lives of survivors choosing Britain as their home. Through this narrative, Britain becomes a country of refuge for this handful of survivors, while a more balanced account of the treatment of refugees after the war was entirely rejected. As Suzanne Bardgett stated in a memorandum to then Director-General, Robert Crawford:

On the question of where we can include the internment of aliens, I think on reflection this can be dropped from our story – other than a short reference in one of the texts – without incurring too much criticism. [...] We do have some interesting artefacts – eg a scrap book made by Isle of Man internees – but in story telling terms to introduce the notion of people behind barbed wire in Britain will give the wrong message.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Bob Baxter, in conversation with author, January 8, 2015.

<sup>191</sup> Suzanne Bardgett, in conversation with author, February 10, 2015.

<sup>192</sup> Memorandum sent from Suzanne Bardgett to the Director General of the IWM, January 14, 1998, Thousands Seek Refuge File, Holocaust Exhibition Archive, Imperial War Museum, London.

Illustration Four: Discovery of the Camps, *image courtesy of IWM, London*



The text detailing the Displaced Persons' (hereafter DP) camps reveals very little in terms of critical reflection on British responses, but rather highlights that, for many, any home survivors had previously known no longer existed. A general fear among survivors of rising anti-Semitic violence within eastern Europe is cited as a reason for why many survivors remained in camps for months, even years after their 'liberation.' Scholarly work is now emerging on the history of the DP camps,<sup>193</sup> which provides an alternative framework for understanding the moment of liberation as the beginning of a new chapter in Holocaust history rather than an end. This work also raises serious questions over the treatment of Jewish victims in Britain during and after the Holocaust that offers a contrast to the current treatment afforded Holocaust survivors as the centre of educational and commemorative events and practices in Britain. The approach currently taken by the IWMHE provides little depth to our understanding of the Holocaust in the twentyfirst century. The use of photographs such as the bulldozer in Belsen may incite horror and revulsion but what does it actually tell (or teach) us? Barbie Zelizer, in her study of images of the Holocaust, asks what kind of reference point such photographs provide,

As we stand at century's end and look back, the visual memories of the Holocaust set in place fifty-odd years ago seem oddly unsatisfying. The mounds of corpses, gaping pits of bodies, and figures angled like matchsticks across the camera's field of vision have paralyzed many of us to the point of critical inattention. But they have provided only a thin veneer of knowledge about the camps and the atrocities that took place inside.<sup>194</sup>

Now 70 years on, the same photographs are used to depict the Holocaust with little development in thought on the 'knowledge' they impart. What can visitors take away from an image of corpses? Particularly an image many confuse and assume it to be Nazis bulldozing bodies. What narratives are lost as museums, exhibitions and memorials select the same images for re-presentation? Visitors may never hear the stories of life in a DP camp on the Isle of Man as their narratives have been relegated to the archive (to eventually be disposed of). Visitors are thus unable to incorporate such narratives into their own self-understandings and reflections on what it means to be British.

#### Personal stories of the Holocaust within the Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition

Holocaust exhibition designer, Bob Baxter discussed the importance of telling individual stories within the final displays, to personalise the history rather than present the murder

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<sup>193</sup> See, for example, the work of Dan Stone, *The Liberation of the Camps: The End of The Holocaust and its Aftermath* (London: Yale University Press, 2015).

<sup>194</sup> Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget*, 1.

of millions.<sup>195</sup> The photographs included within the opening cone of the exhibition offer visitors the opportunity to see those who would later be identified as victims of Nazi crimes in familiar settings, such as family holidays, gatherings and special occasions. This theme is continued throughout the exhibition with a series of personal stories intended to allow visitors to grasp the human impact of what was to unfold. Photographs accompany these stories to illustrate the personal narratives of those who fell victim to Nazi persecution policies. IWMHE director, Suzanne Bardgett spoke of an exercise carried out in drafting this stage of the exhibition's design:

if we could choose just eight photographs to tell the story which would they be? The topline 'thumping narrative' was what drove the story, but, we realised, carefully chosen, strategically positioned photographic stills would – for many – be the more memorable strand of story-telling.<sup>196</sup>

Personal narratives, along with supporting photographic or artifactual (or both) evidence, punctuates the master narrative of the exhibition at certain junctures. These mini-narratives are incorporated within the broader story of the Holocaust but are denied agency of their own. The way these narratives have been used within the exhibition prioritises the master narrative, or 'topline thumping narrative', over the personal experiences of Holocaust victims (both those who survived and those who perished). Without agency, this further demonstrates how Holocaust victims within the exhibition are simply used to illustrate what was 'done to them' rather than the human experience of war (as is stated within the IWM's remit, although arguably the remit covers the British experience of war rather than Jewish). Only those experiences that support the master narrative are heard, with others denied a voice; at best, relegated to the archive, at worst, left off the record completely and permanently.

There are 45 personal stories included within the IWMHE, all of which were selected for their connection to a particular aspect of the master narrative. Researchers for the exhibition, employed mainly for their language skills and connections to institutions throughout Europe, were responsible for certain sections of the exhibition. A part of this role involved sourcing such stories along with their accompanying documents, artifacts and photographs. Personal narratives were incorporated into the final exhibition where they spoke of broader themes within the Holocaust story as defined by the IWM. It was necessary for these personal narratives to link to larger narratives, forcing a relationship

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<sup>195</sup> Bob Baxter, in conversation with the author, January 8, 2015.

<sup>196</sup> Suzanne Bardgett, in conversation with author, February 10, 2015.

between the particular and the generalised; the context and structure of the exhibition wholly shapes the personal narratives as they illustrate broader themes. Here, individual (or group) memory becomes diluted to serve the purpose of a collective. As Rebecca Clifford identifies,

While the memories of individuals and groups play an important role in the creation of shared cultural knowledge of the past, the body of culturally constructed images, symbols, and narratives of the past that terms such as 'national memory' seek to describe is often far removed from actual lived experience.<sup>197</sup>

The obscure and specific are removed in favour of the lucid and general. While the personal stories appear to inject detail of individual experience into the master narrative, they do so only where what they speak of offers broader resonance for the exhibition's story. Suzanne Bardgett has described these stories as 'private family records that had not been seen in public before'. These private records, 'mined from dozens of suitcases in attics'<sup>198</sup> are taken from the realm of the private into the public with seemingly little thought given to how this would alter their meanings, for both the individuals at the heart of these stories and the public encountering them within a museum environment. Only certain aspects of these personal stories are of relevance to the exhibition, and this is in part highlighted through their accompanying photographs. Each personal story is illustrated by a photograph of the person, which, according to Bardgett, was taken as close as possible to the date at which their story appears.<sup>199</sup> Researchers from the IWMHE spent many hours with survivors, family and friends to select photographs that could best represent an aspect of the Holocaust exhibition's master narrative. It was believed that photographs would provide a more memorable strand of story-telling, they could illustrate the stories of individuals and personalise the suffering of many.

In the 'Racial State' section, two portrait pictures have been enlarged to seven times life-size to illustrate the stories of Emmi G and Anna V. The exhibition text informs the visitor how Anna V,

spent most of her childhood in orphanages and institutions. At 21, unemployed and considered 'asocial', she was sent to the asylum at Hadamar where a doctor diagnosed 'innate feeble-mindedness'. The hospital then started procedures to have her sterilized, arguing that Anna V's children would inherit their mother's

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<sup>197</sup> Clifford, *Commemorating the Holocaust*, 21.

<sup>198</sup> Suzanne Bardgett, in conversation with author, February 10, 2015.

<sup>199</sup> Suzanne Bardgett, in conversation with author, February 10, 2015.

supposedly bad genes. In April 1938 she gave birth to a girl who was immediately put into care. A month later, Anna was sterilised.

Anna V's photograph and accompanying story was sought as an illustration of sterilisation in Nazi Germany. Bardgett remarked,

To make prominent these unknowing faces showed the ghastly outcome of the Nazis' perversion of biological science in very human terms. Two young women robbed of their natural right to have children: what kind of law-makers did that?<sup>200</sup>

This decontextualised account of forced sterilisation within Nazi Germany fails to take into consideration the context of the time. Forced sterilisation was not a policy exclusive to Nazi Germany and was, in fact, discussed at length throughout Europe, including in Britain.<sup>201</sup>

Situating such a narrative within the IWMHE is problematic on a number of levels, not only in its oversimplification of history. The narrative presented fails to connect the audience to a narrative of psychiatric care strongly linked to the IWM site in Lambeth as the former Bethlem Psychiatric Hospital and this has consequences for how visitors understand the Holocaust and Nazism more broadly. The IWMHE opted to construct a narrative that would simplistically villainise, and Other, the Nazis to illustrate what Bardgett describes as their 'perversion of biological science.'<sup>202</sup>

These actions, rather than confronted in context, are depicted as the act of an 'evil' regime. But here we must question what 'lessons' can be drawn from such a display? Bardgett asks what kind of law-makers did this, but the answer is far more complex than the exhibition allows for. The full context produces an entirely different perspective and understanding of this section, which is arguably relevant in the context of a former psychiatric hospital. The Report of The Royal Commission on the Care and Control of the Feeble-Minded published in Britain in 1908 identified evidence to the effect that,

probably, in the case of the feeble-minded, there is a larger birth rate than normal, combined with a death rate, which, though large, allows of a considerable survival of mentally defective persons.<sup>203</sup>

The report stated a belief that the 'feeble-minded' were inclined to have larger families, and that 'feeble-mindedness' was thought to be a 'dangerous' hereditary condition.

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<sup>200</sup> Suzanne Bardgett, in conversation with author, February 10, 2015.

<sup>201</sup> See Randall Hansen and Desmond King, "Eugenic Ideas, Political Interests, and Policy Variance: Immigration and Sterilization Policy in Britain and the U.S." *World Politics* 53, no. 2 (2001): 237-263

<sup>202</sup> Suzanne Bardgett, in conversation with author, February 10, 2015.

<sup>203</sup> Report of The Royal Commission on the Care and Control of the Feeble-Minded, Command Paper 4202, 1908, Harvard University Collection, online archive, accessed March, 2015, 202, <https://archive.org/details/reportroyalcomm>.



While no laws were passed to allow for the sterilisation of psychiatric patients within Britain at this time, measures were put in place to restrict marriages and to segregate those of 'feeble-mind', thus effectively denying them the right to have children. Discussions on this matter were openly held, illustrating this line of thinking reached far beyond Nazism. Considering a broader context of Nazi policies and actions, and even a broader context of Britain's relationship to the Holocaust, perspectives and understanding of Nazi actions move beyond a belief in the barbarity of Nazi crimes towards a genuine engagement with history and its ramifications for the here and now. The enlarged photograph of Anna V, along with her personal story of sterilisation within Nazi Germany, signifies far more than the 'evil' of a regime that denied women their natural right to motherhood. This represents a larger movement of the time, in which forced sterilisations took place across Europe, America, and Canada, albeit on a greater scale within Germany. More than this, the history Anna V represents is a part of a wider context of the history of psychiatry, which also has wider implications for representations of the Holocaust within the IWM.

The story of Anna V arrived within the IWMHE from an institution in Berlin – the Karl Bonhoeffer psychiatric hospital – and had also been discussed within Michael Burleigh's scholarly text, *Death and Deliverance: 'Euthanasia' in Germany 1900-1945*.<sup>204</sup> The Karl Bonhoeffer hospital, formerly the Wittenau sanatorium during the Nazi period (now Totgeschwiegen), is currently the site of a permanent exhibition on the history of psychiatric care under National Socialism designed to prevent a repetition of past crimes within the psychiatric profession. This marks a facing-up to the Nazi past within an institution directly involved in the ill-treatment, sterilisation and euthanasia of patients deemed unworthy of life. In 1980, 100 years after the opening of the hospital, it was noted very little was known on this dark chapter in the institution's history. After extensive research, including a search for any surviving documents from the Nazi period, the exhibition *Hushed, 1933-1945* opened in 1988, detailing the history of Wittenau. Former patients, such as Anna V, had their stories publicly shared for the purpose of education and commemoration. The rationale for this is clear, the intentions of the institution to address the past followed a general trend of the 1980s (especially following psychiatric reform within Germany at this time) to admit to past atrocities in an attempt at working-through this previously silenced history.

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<sup>204</sup> Michael Burleigh, *Death and Deliverance: 'Euthanasia' in Germany, 1900-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

Anna V was removed from this context in which she represented a moving forward within Germany and placed within a museum of warfare that, ironically, is also a former psychiatric hospital. Her story is generalised and used to reflect British identity, to represent the evil or barbarity of Nazism without a need to acknowledge local issues. There is no call to address the conditions under which such actions or laws became possible while the history depicted remains at a distance. The purpose of Anna V's story is adapted, it is no longer used as a means of working-through history, but is used as a way of avoiding such a working-through. As we read of Anna V's plight within the Nazi system, specifically within Wittenau sanatorium, we are unaware of the global conditions in which sterilisation became a widely accepted solution to a perceived societal problem. This actively avoids a confrontation with British attitudes towards psychiatry and genetics at the time, despite this being an ideal location for open debate. This raises questions of what visitors are learning about citizenship when reactions largely involve revulsion against an evil regime in place of a confrontation with a difficult British past.

Taken from its context within the former Wittenau sanatorium, the story of Anna V takes on new meanings entirely detached from the history it has been employed to represent. Such narratives bring with them a mark, or a shadow, of their former purpose, though become entirely re-imagined within their new surroundings. This meeting of memories produces a hybrid form in which narratives of another time and place become intertwined with narratives of the present. This is complicated further when we consider the transnational nature of Holocaust narratives and memory. How has Anna V, a 'feeble-minded' psychiatric patient in 1930s Germany, been made to fit within a museum of modern warfare situated within a former psychiatric hospital in London in the twentyfirst century, and what does this reveal about the construction of Holocaust memory within Britain today? The motivation of memory through the museum is challenged when we consider to what purpose Anna V's personal story has been put. In Germany, Anna V's personal narrative forces a confrontation with a difficult past, one, it was hoped, would provide lessons for the future in an open and honest address of past wrongs. In Britain, personal narratives such as these provide evidence of what Britain proudly fought against, and the value of this is somewhat questionable.

Bardgett discussed the necessity of avoiding photographic displays that would be too familiar with the visiting audience, suggesting the exhibition intended to offer something

new for Britain.<sup>205</sup> Despite this, particularly striking familiar examples would still be considered,

many 'iconic' images – the SA man gesticulating at the crowds outside a broken shop front the morning after *Kristallnacht*, the mother clutching her child as they are about to be shot on the Eastern front, the British soldier using a bulldozer to bury bodies at Belsen – had such power that it seemed self-defeating to exclude them simply because they were on show elsewhere.<sup>206</sup>

This reveals an underlying assumption that photographs themselves reveal a truth, rather than an acknowledgement that their uses, both in this museum exhibition and elsewhere, determine how the photographs will be read. The iconic images Bardgett discusses have become iconic because of the perceived clarity of their representations, but these meanings have been inscribed upon the images and do not spring from the images unmediated. Many of the photographs here have been reduced to the value of symbols of suffering rather than presented as historical documents in their own right. The photographs used reveal far more about the history of the Holocaust than is allowed for within the restrictive master narrative of the exhibition, which, unfortunately, impedes rather than teaches any potential 'lessons' of history. The IWMHE have an opportunity to engage with Holocaust history through their photographic display, to use the documents as source material in educating new generations on the Holocaust and its relevance for society today. To do this, however, requires contextualisation and an open approach to the material. Visitors, at present, are unaware of the sources of the photographs, their intersections with British history, or where and for what purpose they have previously been used. As a result, photographs are included within the IWMHE display with very little responsibility, selected for their ability to illustrate what has become a dated master narrative.

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<sup>205</sup> Suzanne Bardgett, in conversation with author, February 10, 2015.

<sup>206</sup> Suzanne Bardgett, in conversation with author, February 10, 2015.

**The Holocaust Through Objects: Narrative, Biography and Memory in the Museum**

As with all museums, the IWMHE uses the tangible remnants of the past to provide 'evidence' of a historical 'truth'. Objects are used to anchor a narrative in the traditional sense of the museum, that is, to display and interpret a series of artefacts collected by the museum in relation to that museum's collection policy. For the IWM, collections are formed on the basis of its remit; to document all conflicts involving Britain and the commonwealth and 'to provide for, and to encourage, the study and understanding of the history of modern war and "wartime experience"'.<sup>207</sup> It is within this context that material relating to the Nazi persecution of the Jews of Europe and events of the Holocaust would be interpreted. It is the purpose of this chapter to illuminate the process of material selection within the IWM, and to explore in greater depth how this material has been interpreted within the framework of a British museum of warfare. It considers the relationship between cultural memory and objects, exploring the construction of Holocaust memory in the museum through surviving material remains; much of which arrived at the IWM from other Holocaust museums and archives. This chapter explores how the Holocaust story is both shaped and legitimised through Holocaust objects and, on a general level, questions what is meant by the term 'Holocaust object'. How are Holocaust objects defined and categorised, and what does this mean for the long-term survival of such material? An object's significance is illustrated by its inclusion within a museum display, such an object must have the ability to speak of a world beyond itself if it is to be incorporated into the display and this status is reflective of a current value system. We may assume only those objects considered of value are collected, preserved and displayed. This chapter questions what is considered of value, materially, to Holocaust memory today and how this material is used within Britain to tell a story of the Holocaust.

Susan Stabile has argued when an artefact enters a collection, 'its social biography is overwritten with a new narrative. Curated objects have relevance - and mnemonic resonance', Stabile claims, 'only in relation to the other objects in the museum's collection.' As a result, despite their mission to preserve cultural memory, 'museums often have the unintended effect of rewriting it.'<sup>208</sup> When an object is acquired by the museum, incorporated within a collection, interpreted as a part of this collection, and then displayed

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<sup>207</sup> "Imperial War Museum History," Imperial War Museum, London, accessed April, 2015, <http://iwm.org/history>.

<sup>208</sup> Stabile, "Biography of a Box," 205.

as such, it is immediately decontextualised and then recontextualised with an entirely new purpose. Context, according to Karin Dannehl, 'affixes meaning to an expression or event'.<sup>209</sup> When those objects are removed from their original (or, at the very least, previous) contexts, their meanings alter as they are understood in different, possibly opposing ways. Despite the status of historical evidence within the museum, objects cannot serve as concrete examples of a historical reality. Though, despite this, objects are frequently used to legitimise a particular historical narrative; to provide proof and authenticity to the truth claims made through the displays. Object meaning is generated through the display, just as the collection as a whole takes meaning from the sum of its individual objects, each object contributes towards developing an overall sense of the past. The collection is important in understanding how material objects are brought together for the purpose of coherence, however, a close reading of individual objects reveals how this seemingly natural coherence is an institutional construction. Individual objects do not speak for themselves, narratives are shaped to fit with the intentions of the museum. Individually objects can present many 'realities', when part of a collection, meaning is shaped through the narrative binding them together. As a part of a collection within a narrative museum, objects lose their agency and the exhibition shifts focus from the collected object to the narratives that exist externally to the material itself. Narrative exhibitions, such as the IWMHE, discuss broader themes and contexts, rather than the themes presented through the artefact itself and this results in an emphasis on story above collected artefact. We can only make assumptions on what this means for the future of objects. When the material upon which museums base their existence is valued below the stories they tell, what will happen to the collection process in the future?

Our relationship to certain objects has been defined through a material culture of the Holocaust. The ability of objects to evoke certain memories - or perhaps, more accurately, 'imagined memories'<sup>210</sup> - attests to the metonymic power of the object. This chapter explores the process of meaning-making through artefacts within the IWMHE. It explores how meanings are not only inscribed by the institution through the process of building a

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<sup>209</sup> Karin Dannehl, "Object Biographies: From Production to Consumption," in *History and Material Culture: A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources*, ed. Karen Harvey (Abingdon, Routledge, 2009), 126.

<sup>210</sup> Andreas Huyssen argues memory is, in a sense, always imagined. However, in this context, Huyssen uses the term 'imagined memories' to distinguish between those memories grounded in lived experience from those 'pillaged from the archive and mass-marketed for fast consumption'. Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003) 166 [note 13]

museum collection, but demonstrates how artefacts arrive at the museum with pre-existing baggage; existing narratives that are then woven into a new institutional context. The artefacts, it is claimed here, are in dialogue with the institution and the memories constructed are the result of a fusing of past narratives with present. Here it is explored how material objects - seemingly solid tangible evidence of a past - travel through a process of use, discarding, contextualisation, interpretation, recontextualisation and reinterpretation, which reveals a complex relationship between people, society, and objects. This investigation provides an indication of how the Holocaust is defined within the IWMHE as indicative to a broader cultural understanding within Britain. This is not achieved through an understanding of the prescribed definitions, but through an exposure of the underlying assumptions that drive the material display of the IWMHE. As Daniel Miller has argued, there is a discrepancy between what people say matters and what they actually give their attention to.<sup>211</sup> What people, a community, group, or individual, do with objects, exposes the beliefs upon which decisions are made. These decisions have ramifications for how the Holocaust is understood both now and in the future. With few remaining Holocaust survivors, the material witness will be all that is left for future generations, thus it seems vital that we challenge what is collected and preserved in a self-conscious, self-reflective and critical way.

What matters with regards to the Holocaust demonstrates the relationship between people and objects (the subject of material culture studies) and, in this particular case, the relationship between [people in] Britain and objects of the Holocaust displayed within an important national museum. What is articulated as significant within the permanent exhibition? Every object chosen for display provides evidence of what matters (represented through literal matter) in the construction of a cultural memory of the Holocaust in Britain.

#### Acquiring Holocaust objects

The words 'object', and 'artefact' are often used interchangeably so it will be useful to offer a tighter definition here. As Susan Pearce has observed, these terms share common ground 'in that they all refer to selected lumps of the physical world to which cultural value has been ascribed.'<sup>212</sup> Object is used to refer to this lump, where artefact considers its cultural value within the context of a museum display; artefact is used in an archaeological sense

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<sup>211</sup> Daniel Miller, "Why Some Things Matter," in *Material Cultures: Why Some Things Matter*, ed. Daniel Miller (London: UCL Press, 1998), 12.

<sup>212</sup> Susan M. Pearce, "Museum Objects," in *Interpreting Objects and Collections*, ed. Susan M. Pearce (Abingdon: Routledge, 1994), 9.

when referring to an object of particular interest. When an object is acquired by the museum, it becomes a cultural artefact; interpreted within the framework of the displaying institution. In a study of material culture it is not the object itself that we consider but its description and contextualisation, which is determined by a specific cultural value system. Arthur Asa Berger argues that cultural values and beliefs are manifested in artefacts, that is, in material culture, not in the objects themselves but in the way they are interpreted.<sup>213</sup> Of interest here is the ways in which the IWM have acquired objects for display within the permanent Holocaust exhibition, how those objects have been taken from their previous contexts (in many cases, other museums) and reinterpreted as Holocaust artefacts within the context of the IWMHE. This reinterpretation does not suggest the stories accompanying objects have been intentionally altered by the IWM, but their incorporation into a Holocaust display within the museum forces a reinterpretation through a change in context. How, for example, is the story of Ernst Lossa altered by its movement from one institution to another? Lossa was a child murdered as a part of the euthanasia programme in Nazi Germany and is represented materially within the IWMHE through a facsimile of the last page of Ernst Lossa's patient file. The original documents remain on display at a memorial exhibition within the grounds of the former Kaufbeuren-Irsee Psychiatric Hospital.

As planning for the IWMHE began in 1996, HEPO put out a call for material relating to the Nazi period among the survivor community in Britain, as well as through institutions abroad. While the IWM archive boasted an impressive selection of Holocaust related material, it focused predominantly on British relief efforts, military records and the liberation of Belsen. An increase of interest in the Nazi period, and the Holocaust specifically, in the mid 1990s (after the so-called year of the Holocaust in 1993, which demonstrated a broad public appeal with the opening of the USHMM and the box office success of Spielberg's *Schindler's List*) resulted in material becoming more difficult to acquire. The opening of several Holocaust exhibitions following the success of the USHMM (and a rise in public consciousness of the Holocaust) rendered the relatively scarce Holocaust objects far more valuable.<sup>214</sup> The first two years of the Holocaust exhibition project was, according to Suzanne Bardgett, dominated by the quest for 'three-dimensional' material. HEPO were anxious that, as this was to be Britain's principle

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<sup>213</sup> Arthur Asa Berger, *What Objects Mean: An Introduction to Material Culture* (Walnut Creek: Left Coast Press, 2009), 17.

<sup>214</sup> Board Paper 1996/4 Item 5 (Encl C) October 25 1996, Acquisitions File, Holocaust Exhibition Archive, Imperial War Museum, London.

exhibition on the Holocaust, funded to the sum of £12.6 million through the Heritage Lottery Fund, expectations would be high. Bardgett claims that, when beginning the acquisitions process in 1996,

the number of objects related to Nazi persecution - when laid out for the project team's inspection - barely covered one table. There was plenty of 'flat evidence' in terms of documents, film and photographs relating to Nazi Europe and a lot of oral history interviews, but as regards artefacts which told the story of what happened to millions of families deliberately targeted for persecution and eventual extermination by the Nazis, we had very little.<sup>215</sup>

The IWM employed a number of recent graduates, most with relevant languages, to undertake research for the exhibition. This was divided into sections, with four 'section compilers' responsible for the research and drafting of their individual sections. The team as a whole were encouraged to watch documentary films on the subject in the hope this would offer insight into the kinds of objects they might find. These were to be the 'reference points', along with any books, films, photographs, and existing museums and exhibitions.<sup>216</sup> Three documentaries were of particular interest over the course of the planning stages: *The World at War* (Thames Television, 1973-1974), particularly the episode 'Genocide'; *Peoples Century* (BBC, 1995), particularly the episode '1933: Master Race'; and Laurence Rees' *The Nazis: A Warning from History* (BBC, 1997). Suzanne Bardgett, along with other members of the curatorial and design team, visited Yad Vashem, the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum and USHMM to assess what they felt 'worked' within the displays and those areas it was felt the IWM could improve on. Bardgett stated how much was 'absorbed' from other sites and museums, and here clues could be found as to the kinds of objects that could be acquired,

On a visit to the Auschwitz State Museum it was instructive to walk round the former prisoner barracks, which the museum authorities had allocated to different countries to curate their own accounts of the Nazi crimes. In the Belgian display, we sensed the potency of several dozen camp uniforms lined up together: one conveyed a single experience, a dozen spoke of the dehumanization of many.<sup>217</sup>

It was when visiting the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, IWMHE designer Bob Baxter realised the Holocaust could not 'travel' to London; that is, the 'authenticity' of the site in

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<sup>215</sup> Bardgett, "The Material Culture of Persecution," 21-22.

<sup>216</sup> Bardgett, "The Material Culture of Persecution," 22-23.

<sup>217</sup> Bardgett, "The Material Culture of Persecution," 23.



Poland should be respected and reconstruction should be avoided within the IWM display.<sup>218</sup> HEPO discussed including

peculiar street furniture of Polish cities; the religious items that would convey the specific culture that had been lost during the years of Nazi oppression and mass murder; the desirability of having variety as the visitor progressed through the display.<sup>219</sup>

HEPO were clear in their intention to offer only 'authentic historical evidence' through the planned Holocaust exhibition.<sup>220</sup> Showcases were to offer an 'abundance of original material - documents, objects, posters, cartoons, paintings, pamphlets and newspapers - much of which will not have been displayed in Britain before.'<sup>221</sup> A considerable amount of this material was to found in the IWM archive, however,

to provide a balanced picture of events across Europe a major acquisitions and research programme is being undertaken, directed by survivors and witnesses in this country and at museums, archives and other institutions in Germany and the former Allied, occupied and neutral countries.<sup>222</sup>

HEPO launched a major international search for material relating to the Holocaust period, which would focus efforts on existing museums, exhibitions, and archives. Objects were sought to reflect a global Holocaust narrative, for instance, material relating to a narrative of Russian POWs would be sought in Russia in an attempt to offer a 'balanced' perspective.<sup>223</sup> Despite an urgency to fill the 'seventy or so showcases' with strong material,<sup>224</sup> strict criteria were to be applied to all identified material. Firstly, within Britain, a call for material was made through the press and survivor communities. HEPO were hoping to hear from anyone in the United Kingdom who had material that could be loaned or donated to the IWM for display. In particular they highlighted a desire to hear from any survivors of the Nazi camps now living in Britain, anyone arriving in Britain as a part of the Kindertransport scheme, and 'civilians and former servicemen whose personal experience during the Second World War impinged on or was affected by the plight of the Jews of Europe (such as members of the press, the clergy, and POWs interned in Nazi camps)'.<sup>225</sup> This material would provide a British angle within the exhibition and sought objects and

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<sup>218</sup> Bob Baxter, in conversation with author, January 8, 2015.

<sup>219</sup> Bardgett, "The Material Culture of Persecution," 22-23.

<sup>220</sup> Press Notice Holocaust Exhibition: Appeal for material for display, April 1996, Collection Building: Strategy and Planning File, Holocaust Exhibition Archive, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>221</sup> Press Notice Holocaust Exhibition: Appeal for material for display, April 1996.

<sup>222</sup> Press Notice Holocaust Exhibition: Appeal for material for display, April 1996.

<sup>223</sup> Press Notice Holocaust Exhibition: Appeal for material for display, April 1996.

<sup>224</sup> Bardgett, "The Material Culture of Persecution," 23.

<sup>225</sup> Press Notice Holocaust Exhibition: Appeal for material for display, April 1996.

narratives that had not previously been displayed within a permanent exhibition context. Unlike the search for material across Europe, which focused on objects already institutionalised, the call for material within Britain held the possibility of finding those objects that had not yet reached the public domain; those personal family relics that represent intimate family narratives.

Several lists were drafted on the kinds of objects HEPO hoped to find, these were added to or adapted as the research developed. The lists were organised thematically, providing an insight into how the IWMHE connected objects to wider concepts. What, for example, would be the preferred artefacts for representing the 'Rise of the Nazis'? or for 'Thousands Seek Refuge'? This indicates how the Holocaust is imagined within British consciousness; an SA uniform, NSDAP sign, NSDAP membership books, car pennants and flags, Hitler youth flag and uniform, a copy of *Mein Kampf*, a Nazi beer mug with an eagle and swastika and a doll dressed in a Nazi uniform were the objects of choice for the section dealing with the rise of the Nazis.<sup>226</sup> These exemplary objects are formal or organisational, with a political connection distinct from the domestic. Such objects contribute to the structuring of the perpetrator as an organised, well-defined, body of people. To emphasise the uniform is to set the group apart; they are comfortably 'not like us' through their costume. The display of military uniforms within the opening sections of the Holocaust exhibition is suggestive of power and dominance, setting the scene for an aggressive force sweeping through Europe. In contrast to this, those objects sought to represent the plight of the victims emphasise the domestic context.<sup>227</sup> This presents the victim and perpetrator in clearly defined, opposing, categories. With visitors to the exhibition expected to identify victims as 'just like us' (demonstrated through an emphasis on the domestic context), placing the perpetrators within a well-defined group or category allows visitors to safely distance themselves.

To represent lives lost, Bardgett identified objects such as a doll, a child's dress, adult civilian clothing (with a story attached), prayer shawls, a pram, a sewing machine, a radio, a school desk, a telephone, a typewriter, luggage, books (a row or pile to signify learning to read), furniture, musical instruments, beer mugs, doors and gates (to a railcar or building), street furniture (such as a lamp or door plates), and a camera or film camera. Such objects signify ordinary lives disrupted. A pile of books to signify learning to read is suggestive of a

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<sup>226</sup> Holocaust Exhibition: List of artefacts for inclusion, January 1998, Acquisitions File, Holocaust Exhibition Archive, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>227</sup> Holocaust Exhibition: Artefacts of which we should aim to have at least one example (for interest, pace, texture etc. and to emphasise domestic context), March 3 1998, Acquisitions File, Holocaust Exhibition Archive, Imperial War Museum, London.

childhood interrupted, a pram, musical instruments and a beer mug (distinct from the Nazi beer mug with Nazi emblems) highlights domesticity; ordinary lives destroyed by the Nazi force. There are no connections made between the objects identified to represent the perpetrators and those to represent victims within the exhibition. Where Nazi uniforms were sought as representative of perpetrator history, civilian clothing (with a particular story attached) was requested for the sections dealing with victim experience. No personal items were sought to represent the Nazis, unless they were used by a particularly recognisable figure, the visitor never 'gets to know' the perpetrator in the same way they do the victim. We do not know whose SA uniform is on display at the beginning of the exhibition (this is the second artefact the visitor encounters on entering the museum). We are also unaware of whose photograph album is displayed beside this other than, as the caption informs us, a 'Photo album belonging to an SA man from Hamburg'. In contrast, a photograph album depicting pre-war life in Poland, situated within the ghettos section, is attributed to Irena Pasternak who died of pneumonia in the Krakow ghetto. And a red jumper, worn in Auschwitz, once belonged to Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, a survivor who later settled in Britain. Through such display techniques, the IWMHE presents the perpetrator as abstract and inhuman alongside the humanity of the victim.

Once material had been identified, as a part of the selecting and recording process, HEPO drafted a set of questions to ask of each item. On selecting an object for possible inclusion within the final display it was first questioned, is it relevant? The team had already begun drafting an overarching narrative of the Holocaust, made up of 29 'chapters'. The material would need to comfortably fit within the story as told through the 29 sections. If the narrative of an object was deemed so complicated or unrepresentative that it was unlikely to be included 'for fear of seeming incongruous or of diverting from the main story' then it was to be left out. On selecting material the team were reminded, 'the nature of what we are documenting means that much of what is collected will need to be representative of what happened to masses of people. Isolated incidents - particularly if they are atypical - will tend to jar somewhat.'<sup>228</sup> The objects sought for inclusion within the IWMHE were to be representative of the Holocaust as it was publicly understood in Britain; that is, as it had been represented previously through films, documentaries, books, museums and exhibitions and the media. This heavily influenced the kinds of objects sought and selected and, thus, the story of the Holocaust as it would be told through the exhibition's artefacts.

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<sup>228</sup> Holocaust Exhibition: Artefacts of which we should aim to have at least one example (for interest, pace, texture etc. and to emphasise domestic context), March 3 1998.

### Narrating the Holocaust through artefacts

In brainstorming ideas for the Holocaust exhibition, HEPO wanted variety but the emphasis was to remain on 'ordinary lives overturned'.<sup>229</sup> When it came to presenting the victim experience of the Holocaust, the exhibition aimed to focus on personal stories, artefacts were chosen for display based on the poignant stories of which they were representative. These stories, however, could be adapted to suit the aspirations and limitations of the exhibition, clearly demonstrating a process of construction within the final display.

A photograph album that once belonged to Irena Pasternak was acquired by the IWMHE. This album illustrates how the use of an artefact within the display can alter its interpretation and perception, and thus affect how an object is understood. The Pasternak album was originally acquired for inclusion within a subsection of the ghettos section, 'The Death Rate Rises'. This artefact has no obvious connection to the Holocaust at first sight. It is an album pictorially documenting Irena's life from birth until 1938 in the family's hometown of Krolewska Huta in Soviet-occupied Poland. The significance of the album is realised when, in 1941, the Nazis invaded and Irena moved to Krakow. After some time in hiding, Irena was moved into the Krakow ghetto where she died of pneumonia. The album's last photograph shows Irena in 1938, before the Nazi invasion, therefore the artefact itself has no connection to the story it narrates. The album was intended for 'The Death Rate Rises' to 'tell the story of death in the ghetto, [...] to show how one girl's life was brought to an end. The photo album is one of only two artefacts (the cart being the other) to tell this particular story.'<sup>230</sup> Practical issues with showcase space resulted in the artefact's movement to another subsection. The album, which was to narrate the story of death in the ghettos is now situated within the ghettos subsection 'Spiritual Resistance'. With no showcase provided for 'The Death Rate Rises', Suzanne Bardgett claimed the

only other suitable place for the album seemed to be "Spiritual Resistance". As the album was not hidden in the ghetto and as Irena's story (as we know it) isn't one of resistance, we now have to interpret the artefact through the suicide of Irena's parents following Irena's death and their imprisonment. As I said above, I preferred using the artefact to tell a different story, but if a showcase cannot be allocated then this is the only alternative as long as yourself and Steve agree with the interpretation.<sup>231</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Suzanne Bardgett, in conversation with author, April 9, 2013.

<sup>230</sup> Memorandum to Suzanne Bardgett from Kathy Jones RE Showcase design - draft layout, July 8, 1999, Section Files: Ghettos, Holocaust Exhibition Archive, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>231</sup> Memorandum to Suzanne Bardgett from Kathy Jones RE Showcase design - draft layout, July 8, 1999.

This album, as has been highlighted, could present a number of interpretations illustrating how meanings are not fixed within the objects themselves, but are constructed around them. Of importance to HEPO here was not a narrative of the Pasternak family as the owners of this photograph album, but of how the album could be used to signify a concept existing outside of the object itself. That is, how it could represent the rising death rate or spiritual resistance within the ghettos. The album has little agency as a remnant of the past, a narrative has been written and the artefact must become a part of the story. In this sense, objects act as props or visual stimulation. Where this becomes problematic, however, is, unlike with film performance, visitors instil musealised artefacts with a level of respect based on a perceived authenticity. The objects themselves are believed to be authentic surviving remnants of a past world, which, of course, they are. However visitors make a connection between story and object, thus rendering the attached narratives authentic in the same sense as the artefact. The deaths of Irena's parents as an act of spiritual resistance is authenticated through the display of the photograph album, which is in itself problematic. The album becomes a material witness of the past in that, rather than accepting the muteness of the artefact, as Oren Baruch Stier has argued, we attribute to it the voice of the past. In this sense, Stier claims, Holocaust artefacts excuse us from memory work as we rely on this 'material witness' rather than our own efforts to remember.<sup>232</sup> The importance of presenting personal narratives of the Holocaust, to highlight individual cases of loss and destruction, has taken precedence over an effort to contextualise the information displayed throughout the Holocaust exhibition. The dual aim of presenting personal stories whilst also generalising about the victim experience are at odds with one another. The personal stories become artificial, almost fictions, and they do so using 'authentic' evidence to substantiate their claims.

Artefacts that have been removed from their original environments and integrated into new, artificial environments, Jennifer Hansen-Glucklich, argues, may act as traces. They can, she suggests, offer a bridge between an artificial site of memory and, what she perceives as, the authentic sites of memory in Poland, Germany, and Austria.<sup>233</sup> The question arises, however, over what such objects become traces of when displaced and re-placed within a new environment, for entirely new purposes. Each artefact, through its displacement and re-placement, introduces a particular version of the Holocaust as it is

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<sup>232</sup> Oren Baruch Stier, *Committed to Memory: Cultural Mediations of the Holocaust* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), 119.

<sup>233</sup> Jennifer Hansen-Glucklich, *Holocaust Memory Reframed: Museums and the Challenges of Representation* (London: Rutgers University Press), 125.

presented within its new context. Here we witness a performance of the object within the museum space. In other words, the Holocaust within the IWMHE is staged to express specific cultural beliefs.

The artefacts on display within the IWMHE, and within many other Holocaust museums and exhibitions, highlight domesticity and reaffirm a certain cultural understanding of the domestic. This is done in such a way within the IWMHE so as to completely separate the realm of the perpetrator from that of the victim. Such a presentation allows the visitor (and the national museum) to distance themselves from the Nazi perpetrators, contributing to a construction of the perpetrator as Other and 'evil', the very antithesis to the self-understandings and self-perceptions of the visitor. It also constructs a notion of Nazism as the very antithesis of what it means to be British, the IWMHE, Tim Cole argues, represents 'the crime of the Other'.<sup>234</sup> The exhibition stages 'evil' Nazis against 'good' Britons in a simplistic polarised reading of the Holocaust as a part of the Second World War. The emphasis on perpetrators within the exhibition is on the detached, militarised, pragmatic and bureaucratic, displaying them in such a way as to appear as 'madmen', cold and calculating; presenting Hitler himself as a vital central figure whose character and powers of control are inhuman, almost god-like. A large portrait of Hitler is displayed relatively early on in the exhibition, it is a large and overbearing image reminiscent of other political portraits of Stalin and Saddam Hussein as they have been publicly circulated (this particular portrait was also on display within the museum before the opening the Holocaust Exhibition within an exhibition on the Second World War). Such images are used to reinforce a powerful image of 'evil'. In an exploration of media representations of Saddam Hussein, Luisa Martin Rojo uses a Foucauldian concept of division to theorise the construction of an inclusive 'us' and exclusive 'them', which simplifies how war is understood. The IWMHE use a similar approach to the construction of Hitler, the Nazis and their collaborators. Hitler is seen as the personification of evil; demonstrated through the prominence of Hitler within the display. Exclusion, Rojo claims, is articulated on two axes: dividing, that is, 'establishing the categories which will be opposed in the conflict - *us*, with several different referents, *vs them*'. The creation of an enemy, Rojo claims, makes it possible as the opponent to establish an inclusive *we*; which is simply defined in opposition.<sup>235</sup> In simplistic terms, when 'they' are presented in negative terms - as 'evil' or

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<sup>234</sup> Cole, "Nativization and Nationalization," 136.

<sup>235</sup> Luisa Martin Rojo, "Division and Rejection: From the Personification of the Gulf Conflict to the Demonization of Saddam Hussein," *Discourse Society* 6, no. 1 (1995): 50-51.

'madmen' - then 'we', in opposition, must be understood only with a positive image. The result, Rojo claims, is a 'we' that remains indefinite

but which evokes a set of shared values that remain implicit. Both the subject and the values are thus under defined, but despite this the reader [in this case, visitor] absorbs them and becomes part of them. By contrast, in the enemy camp there appears a concrete rival who embodies all the anti-values, all the crimes. [...] In this case, a vision of the war is created, transmitted and consolidated.<sup>236</sup>

The IWM's narrative of war affects how the Holocaust is understood, which is unavoidable while the Holocaust remains intimately linked to a narrative of the Second World War within a national war museum. The context of the exhibition, therefore, wholly affects the visitor's understanding of both the war and of the Holocaust. George Lakoff has discussed the 'fairy tale of the just war', which is a useful metaphor for the approach of the IWM to its displays. The Holocaust, or more specifically Belsen, became a justification for war as early as 1945. As Tony Kushner has argued,

The images coming to Britain from Belsen at the time of its liberation were frequently used to illustrate the justification of the British war effort. After 1945 a popular mythology started to develop that Britain had actually fought the war to end Nazi atrocities and even to save the Jews.<sup>237</sup>

Using a 'just war' paradigm, the Holocaust presents a justification for the Second World War, but further than this, within the context of the IWM, the Holocaust becomes justification for all wars in which Britain have been a part. The Holocaust exhibition reinforces an understanding of Britain at war through the 'us' and 'them' scenario. Nowhere in the museum is this construction clearer than within the Holocaust exhibition, where the focus is as much on the 'enemy' - the 'evil' that Britain was fighting against - as on the British wartime experience (as was the museum's sole focus in 2000 when the Holocaust exhibition first opened). George Lakoff has argued

The most natural way to justify a war on moral grounds is to fit this fairy tale structure to a given situation. This is done by metaphorical definition, that is, by answering the questions: who is the victim? Who is the villain? Who is the hero? What is the crime? What counts as victory?<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> Rojo, "Division and Rejection," 50-51.

<sup>237</sup> Tony Kushner, "Approaching Belsen: An Introduction," in *Belsen in History and Memory* ed. Tony Kushner, David Cesarani, Jo Reilly and Colin Richmond (London: Frank Cass, 1997), 12.

<sup>238</sup> George Lakoff, "Metaphor and War: The Metaphor System Used to Justify War in the Gulf, Part 1," Paper presented January 30 1991, accessed April, 2015, <http://www2.iatn.virginia.edu>.

Justified on moral grounds, war becomes a source of pride. The villain is always inherently evil, irrational and thus defying reason. The fairy tale, Lakoff states, has an asymmetry built into it:

The hero is moral and courageous, while the villain is amoral and vicious. The hero is rational, but the villain may be cunning and calculating, he cannot be reasoned with. Heroes thus cannot negotiate with villains; they must defeat them.<sup>239</sup>

The IWMHE, according to then director-general, Robert Crawford, was to show, for the first time, the evil which Britain helped to defeat.<sup>240</sup> Explicitly, and simplistically, reducing the Holocaust exhibition to a fairy tale reading of a complex historical event.

Despite an emphasis on personal stories within the IWMHE, the focus remains largely on the perpetrators. Personal stories act to punctuate the narrative, to illustrate the human impact of perpetrator actions, but they are not afforded a voice on their own terms. The exhibition tells the story of a process of destruction, beginning with persecution and ending with the industrialised methods of murder. This approach becomes clear within the section on Auschwitz-Birkenau and the concentration camp system. The personal stories of victims exist within the museum to illustrate the effects of Nazi policies, constructing a simplistic binary between good and evil that avoids any confrontation with the Holocaust that threatens to blur boundaries or complicate any undefined lessons. Historical advisor to the IWMHE, Martin Smith raised concerns that the Auschwitz model, appearing as the dominant artefact within the section dedicated to camps, did not adequately portray the killing process as the selection (which the model depicts) was only one part of the camp operation. Smith was not convinced the model 'spoke of the nature of the Holocaust'.<sup>241</sup> Smith highlighted the concentration of people in camps and ghettos and mass shootings were nothing new in the 20th century, whereas 'killing centres' like Auschwitz were. Smith wanted the section on Auschwitz to reflect the process of industrialised murder, an approach supported by exhibition director, Suzanne Bardgett. When IWMHE curator, James Taylor responded to Smith's claims the exhibition did not provide enough

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<sup>239</sup> George Lakoff, "Metaphor and War: The Metaphor System Used to Justify War in the Gulf, Part 1,"

<sup>240</sup> Crawford, "Foreword," 8.

<sup>241</sup> Note of a meeting between the museum, the Holocaust exhibition designers and Martin Smith to discuss Auschwitz section, May 21, 1998, Section Files: Auschwitz, Holocaust Exhibition Archive, Imperial War Museum, London.



explanation of the killing process, he stated, 'by this point in the exhibition over three million Jews had already been killed, half of the Holocaust victims.'<sup>242</sup> Bardgett argued,

what was special about the Holocaust, and what needed to be shown, was the fact that for the first time in history humans put other humans in gas chambers, and did so systematically, using industrial methods.<sup>243</sup>

The IWMHE intended to focus on the process of annihilation initiated by the Nazis and, in doing so, the enemy within the story is clearly identified. The history of the Holocaust serves a particular purpose within the IWM, which goes beyond documenting the events as they happened. The central purpose here is not to 'remember' the Holocaust, or to learn the lessons of the past, for the exhibition is more successful in 'forgetting' than it is remembering. Holocaust memory - or, at least, a real confrontation with Holocaust memory - would involve an engagement with the history as it is presented within its local context. Instead, this memory is displaced in favour of an artificial construction of a cultural memory that serves to reaffirm an already accepted version of the past. The danger here is that the Holocaust has become too familiar a concept to have any real meaning in the present. The historical narrative presented within the IWMHE is assimilated to an accepted narrative of war, meaning new connections and intersections are not made or explored between the past and present. Without these connections, the Holocaust can only ever serve superficial concerns; that is, the history of the Holocaust will only be understood publicly in simplistic, binary terms (for example, as a good versus evil fable).

Suzanne Knittel has referred to the history of Auschwitz (using Auschwitz as a metonym for the Holocaust as a whole in public consciousness) - as a 'comfortable horrible' (using Edward Linenthal's words) memory; meaning that it

allows people "to reassure themselves that they are engaging profound events" while failing to engage with other events in the past or in the present that are closer to home and less easy to face or reconcile with their sense of self.<sup>244</sup>

Visitors to the IWMHE leave the exhibition with a sense they have acknowledged this terrible past, and that they are somehow better people for doing so. This is demonstrated through many of the visitor comments left at the end of the exhibition. An overwhelming majority of them are thankful to the museum for displaying such an exhibition. One

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<sup>242</sup> Note of a meeting between the museum, the Holocaust and Martin Smith to discuss Auschwitz section, May 21, 1998.

<sup>243</sup> Note of a meeting between the museum, the Holocaust and Martin Smith to discuss Auschwitz section, May 21, 1998.

<sup>244</sup> Suzanne C. Knittel, *The Historical Uncanny: Disability, Ethnicity, and the Politics of Holocaust Memory* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 10.

comment in particular encapsulated this idea, written in November 2007, the anonymous exhibition visitor states:

This exhibition has been a very sobering and profound experience. Everyone is able to come here and look and listen, should leave as a better human with more compassion for life and gratefulness for what they have.

There are many examples that follow a similar format, and many more that quote the oft-cited, but largely empty, dictum 'never again'

I spent three hours here, and experienced in those three hours so many emotions. I cannot begin to describe how I feel at the moment, but I am thankful - much more thankful than before - for the things I have, the freedoms I enjoy. Thank you for dedicating so much time and so many memories to make this exhibit what it is. I appreciate it more than words can express.

I thought this exhibition made me realise that the things I have are great and I should not take advantage.

A Very good exhibit. One that makes it clear what happened to the Jews and that acts like this should never happen again. We must learn from these atrocities to make the world a better place but not forget what happened to those many innocent people.

The exhibition was a sobering experience, so much to see, everywhere. I almost felt trapped, forever looking behind me only to find more desperation through the pictures. The videos and artefacts made it real, made me feel relieved to be me. I've left with detail and images in my head which will remain in my thoughts, conscience and memory for a long time.<sup>245</sup>

But while visitors feel they have acknowledged a terrible past and, in doing so, contribute towards keeping the 'memory' of the Holocaust alive for future generations, there is also a sense of closure within the comments. Visitors have felt emotion, stated never again, and then are able to move on. This adds weight to Linenthal's suggestion, discussed within Knittel's study, that the Holocaust has become a

'comfortable horrible' memory, allowing Americans to reassure themselves that they are engaging profound events, all the while ignoring more indigestible events that threaten Americans' sense of themselves more than the Holocaust.<sup>246</sup>

Visitors to the IWMHE do not appear to engage with the Holocaust on a deeper level, that is, they do not forge links between Holocaust history, the present and their own life-worlds. Within the context of the IWM, the Holocaust becomes intimately and unavoidably

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<sup>245</sup> A selection of visitor comment cards from 2003-2007, Holocaust Exhibition Archive, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>246</sup> Edward T. Linenthal, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum* (New York: Penguin, 1995), 267.

connected to a British narrative of war, which, with its heroes and villains has been won - the enemy is defeated and victory is with the Allies, Britain among them. This becomes a safe past as it offers the closure visitors seemingly need. What is less comforting are those memories of the Holocaust that destabilise this 'comfortable horrible' memory.

Knittel has argued what is crucial is that we recognise 'how the established conception of the Holocaust itself as a monumental and self-contained event relieves people of the obligation to confront marginalised or repressed aspects of its history.'<sup>247</sup> In her study of the historical uncanny, Knittel identifies that certain narratives of the Holocaust are repressed or forgotten due to a lack of assimilable discourse of commemoration. So, in effect, it becomes easier, or indeed simply acceptable, to commemorate the Holocaust within the strict parameters set out within the IWM as the route has already been paved. In a study of collective memory of the Holocaust in the post-war period, Dan Stone argues that immediately following the war the Holocaust was placed into a context that would not permit 'an in-depth probing of the enormity of what had occurred, but rather incorporated it into a framework, or frameworks, which were already familiar and culturally "safe".'<sup>248</sup> It was important that the traumatic past depicted through a Holocaust exhibition could be incorporated into an already established, culturally 'safe', framework, and the framework of Britain at war was the only choice in the mid-1990s for a museum of modern warfare. It was perhaps the only 'safe' opening for discussion of the Holocaust at that time given the events occurring in Bosnia and Rwanda. The Second World War was far enough in memory that it would not involve immediate action and a call for intervention.

There are, however, limitations with attaching the Holocaust firmly to a narrative of the Second World War; aspects of the narrative considered marginal or particularly difficult to handle within the display are written out of the official memory. This is illustrated through HEPO's handling of the history of 'enemy aliens' within the IWMHE, which Suzanne Bardgett felt could be problematic,

On the question of where we include the internment of aliens, I think on reflection that this can be dropped from our story - other than a short reference in one of the texts - without incurring too much criticism. It is a tangential side-line of the story and given how much we are having to edit and compress, can be excluded on the grounds that it could confuse and impede understanding.

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<sup>247</sup> Knittel, *The Historical Uncanny*, 11.

<sup>248</sup> Dan Stone, "The Domestication of Violence: Forging a Collective Memory of the Holocaust in Britain, 1945-6," *Patterns of Prejudice* 33, no. 2 (1999): 13.

The main problem - as mentioned - is that it belongs chronologically in the wartime scenario - in other words on the lower floor, yet by that point we are scenically in occupied Europe and to introduce the notion of the home front in Britain, Fifth Column fears and this country's reaction to enemy aliens, will only confuse. We do have some interesting artefacts - eg a scrap book made by Isle of Man internees - but in storytelling terms to introduce the notion of people behind barbed wire in Britain will give the wrong message. I suggest therefore that we deal with it in words as a 'flash forward' in the section 'Tens of thousands seek refuge'. Something along the lines: "A year after war broke out many of those who had escaped Nazi Germany found themselves again under the Nazi rule. Those who had reached Britain were ultimately safe, but even they endured the humiliation of being interned by the British authorities who - fearful of the activities of German spies and without properly taking on board the reasons for their flight from Germany - imprisoned them for long periods in internment camps"<sup>249</sup>

It becomes much harder to discuss those narratives that force the museum visitor to confront problematic, difficult or contentious pasts that demand a questioning of their own self-identity. When this happens, the past fails to be 'safe' or 'comfortable' anymore as past narratives collide with present dilemmas. Further than this, that this is considered a 'tangential side-line of the story' suggests the museum itself lacks the sufficient tools to present this as an important aspect of Holocaust history in Britain. When considered carefully, how can the internment of 'enemy aliens' in Britain during the Second World War - those fleeing Nazism - be considered tangential within the context of the IWM? This suggests the overarching narrative of the Holocaust does not allow for an engagement with local memories - that is, a global memory of the Holocaust has become ultimately too influential to allow for local narratives to surface. Or perhaps this confuses the characters within the fairy tale of the just war. With 'people behind barbed wire in Britain' the clear boundaries of victim, hero, and villain are blurred. This is not to say the history cannot be included at all (the museum must be seen to acknowledge Britain's less impressive qualities) but that it can only be covered as a very small, almost hidden, subplot in the master narrative. The hero of the story is allowed to be imperfect, but this must not disturb the overall balance of good versus evil. Within the final exhibition design, the internment of aliens does not appear in a showcase with artefacts or photographs, but as a series of recorded testimonies on a receiver located within the 'Thousands Seek Refuge' section. Despite holding artefacts, photographs and personal stories on this theme within the museum's archive, only the brief oral testimonies of Henry Fulda, describing his internment as an 'enemy alien' on the Isle of Man, and Walter Fliess, who had settled in Britain in 1933

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<sup>249</sup> Memorandum to Director General from Suzanne Bardgett RE Chairman's visit this afternoon, January 14, 1998, Section Files: Thousands Seek Refuge, Holocaust Exhibition Archive, Imperial War Museum, London.

but had been interned as an 'enemy alien' in 1940 and deported to Australia, have been placed into the exhibition and can be accessed via a handset. Extra effort is needed to reach this information as it does not appear in front of the visitor, it can therefore be assumed not all will take the time to listen. This is an important narrative for the history of the Holocaust in Britain and yet, due to its unassimilability to a dominant discourse of remembrance and commemoration in Britain, it is displaced in favour of familiar, comforting narratives.

#### Biography of a table: Representing the 'horrors of euthanasia'

Objects within the museum, particularly museums of traumatic events such as the Holocaust, stand in for the people that once owned, used and discarded them. They are, Richard Crownshaw argues, 'survivors of a kind, the stubborn materiality of these artefacts' he claims, 'fleshes out the identities of which nothing else remains.'<sup>250</sup> Identified as survivors, objects become the irrefutable evidence that this happened, and in this particular way. The museum's interpretation of the Holocaust becomes naturalised through objects, removed from its cultural context. The object becomes the presence of the past itself within the museum, and thus the museum's role as mediator appears removed in a way that films, for example, rarely achieve. Artefacts are presented in such a way within the museum that what they represent and what they actually are become conflated; even among designers and curatorial staff. To illustrate this point, a close reading of an artefact displayed within the IWMHE has been undertaken. This aims to develop a deeper understanding of the construction of Holocaust narratives within the IWM, as well as explore the neglect of other, equally traumatic, narratives that engage with the local context. This will also form the basis of an argument on the movement of memory, that is, how an exhibit travels from one museum exhibition to another and what is revealed within this process. This will offer further insight into what is important to the telling of the Holocaust story in Britain's Holocaust exhibition, and how narratives are adapted between different 'sites of memory'. The detailed study of a dissection table from Kaufbeuren-Irsee Psychiatric Hospital in Bavaria, Germany, explores the relationship between artefact, place, and narrative. This will consider how artefacts are absorbed into the local memory landscape and the effect this has on both the artefact and its surrounding environment. Susan Stabile has highlighted how people 'invest symbolic power in objects; objects, in turn, prompt particular thoughts, emotions, and memories. Social objects and their

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<sup>250</sup> Richard Crownshaw, *The Afterlife of Holocaust Memory in Contemporary Literature and Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 229-230.

evocations, moreover, form a 'biography'. But unlike human biographies that follow a lineage from birth to death, Stabile suggests, 'the biography of things is a palimpsest. It accumulates the social associations ascribed to an object over time'.<sup>251</sup>

### *Contextualising the table*

During the planning and research stages of the Holocaust Exhibition, Suzanne Bardgett wrote to the design team to ask of the possibility of including a two metre long, 80 centimetre wide, one metre high table within the permanent display [see Illustration Five]. The table, Bardgett stated, was made of white marble and had 'the grooved surface and hollowed centre of such tables'.<sup>252</sup> The table had been located in Kaufbeuren-Irsee Psychiatric Hospital having apparently been used to "dissect the bodies of victims of the T4 programme".<sup>253</sup> Enquiries made at the site of the former psychiatric hospital in Irsee introduced HEPO to Michael von Cranach, director of the Kaufbeuren Psychiatric Hospital from 1980 until 2006. The site had gained notoriety as instrumental in Hitler's euthanasia programme, partly through a comprehensive book written on euthanasia by Ernst Klee, and filming the BBC had undertaken at the site prior to the IWM's contact. This is significant as an active cultural memory of the institution already existed within public consciousness (in Germany, at least), within which the table played a role. When taking on the directorship, Michael von Cranach conducted research on the institution in an attempt at working through the past to enable a moving forward within the psychiatric profession. As he states,

I became director of the mental hospital in Kaufbeuren in 1980, I soon realised that the reform I was expected to initiate could not be started without shedding light on this horrible past. I became aware, that patients had been killed in the rooms where we worked, that some of the personnel as well as patients had personally experienced these actions, that this past, long unspoken about and unresolved, was lying like an invisible fog over the whole institution paralysing the necessary reform actions.<sup>254</sup>

Kaufbeuren-Irsee was a hospital based over two locations, both under the care of Kaufbeuren. Michael von Cranach took over Kaufbeuren however the site at Irsee had, after its closure in 1972, become neglected. In 1981, the former hospital site in Irsee was opened as a conference centre, its former use remembered through a memorial site in the

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<sup>251</sup> Stabile, "Biography of a Box," 196.

<sup>252</sup> Letter from Suzanne Bardgett to Bob Baxter RE dissecting table from Kaufbeuren, June 15, 1998, Section Files: Euthanasia, Holocaust Exhibition Archive, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>253</sup> Letter from Suzanne Bardgett to Bob Baxter RE dissecting table from Kaufbeuren, June 15, 1998

<sup>254</sup> Michael Von Cranach, "The Killing of Psychiatric Patients in Nazi-Germany Between 1939-1945," *The Israel Journal of Psychiatry and Related Sciences* 40, no. 1 (2003): 8

Illustration Five: Dissection Table at the Imperial War Museum, *image courtesy of the IWM*



attached cemetery. Having forgotten about a 'dissection cottage' situated on the grounds, this was later uncovered by Michael von Cranach while on a walk through the gardens with Ernst Klee. Believing it to be a building containing garden tools, Michael von Cranach discovered a dissection room that had remained unchanged for a number of years. In the centre of the room was the dissecting table; a table that had been used to dissect corpses during the Nazi period (and before).<sup>255</sup> The room has been preserved and remains a permanent home for the dissection table today, the centre of a memorial at the Kloster Irsee Swabian Conference and Education Centre.<sup>256</sup>

Cranach, along with his colleagues at Kaufbeuren, began with an investigation at the facility's archives and proceeded to interview witnesses of the actions of 1939-1945. From here Cranach established that Kaufbeuren had links to Hitler's Tiergartenstrasse 4 programme (Aktion T4). One nurse, who had worked at the hospital, made the following statement:

According to the obligations that I had been placed under, it was clear to me that the medications would have the purpose of liquidating the patients. However, I did not consider this to be murder, but rather, an assistance to death and a release from suffering.<sup>257</sup>

Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Vermont, Lutz Kaelber, undertook a research project focusing on the children's ward of the Kaufbeuren Psychiatric Hospital between 1941 and 1945.<sup>258</sup> He found 221 children had died at the psychiatric facility, some having been victim to tuberculosis experimentation. Kaufbeuren-Irsee had been headed by physician Valentin Faltlhauser since 1929, and, although he had not joined the Nazi Party until 1935, Holocaust historian Henry Friedlander has documented that Faltlhauser had supported both adult and children's euthanasia. 'In his capacity as director of Kaufbeuren-Irsee, he also directed its children's killing ward; there he continued to kill children even after the war had ended.'<sup>259</sup> The last victim of the children's euthanasia programme at Kaufbeuren had been killed on May 29 1945, four-year old Richard Jenne, weeks after the arrival of American troops in the town. Friedlander has documented how 'the staff killed a

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<sup>255</sup> Michael von Cranach in conversation with author, June 6, 2013.

<sup>256</sup> The conference and education centre hosts conferences, parties, festivals and educational events unrelated to the memory of the Holocaust. The memorial exists on the site but is not the focus of the centre.

<sup>257</sup> Cranach, "The Killing of Psychiatric Patients in Nazi-Germany Between 1939-1945," 6.

<sup>258</sup> "Kaufbeuren Irsee," Lutz Kaelber, accessed January, 2013, [uvm.edu/lkaelber/children/kaufbeurenirsee](http://uvm.edu/lkaelber/children/kaufbeurenirsee).

<sup>259</sup> Henry Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution* (NC: University of North Carolina, 1995), 51.



child in the children's ward for the last time, and at 1.10 pm (13:10 German time), Faltlhauser recorded the death of the child from "typhus".<sup>260</sup>

It was not until Cranach joined Kaufbeuren Psychiatric Hospital that recognition of the hospital's involvement in Nazi atrocities was achieved. Previous to Cranach's instatement, Dr. Faltlhauser had been remembered as a doctor motivated by his 'love and care for the sick' and that the progress of the clinic 'owed a lot to his work'. After the war, Dr. Faultlhauser had received a sentence of 3 years for instigation to be an accessory to manslaughter for the work he had carried out at the Kaufbeuren Psychiatric Hospital. Once the history of the institution had been openly explored, Cranach instigated the placement of a text under Faultlhauser's picture at the hospital detailing his involvement in euthanasia.<sup>261</sup> This marked a new beginning for Kaufbeuren Psychiatric Hospital as it began to openly discuss its darker past and to question how such a thing could have happened.<sup>262</sup>

The detailed historical research into the history of euthanasia during the Nazi period and its broad public dissemination has placed a value on the dissection table. The table has become representative of Hitler's T4 programme and the murder of psychiatric patients in Germany as a whole; it has, in other words, achieved metonymic status. The significance of this object is invested in its associated past, not in the table itself, as it becomes, in the words of Julie Cruikshank, a 'physical manifestation of ideas,'<sup>263</sup> a material platform for disseminating seemingly natural knowledge of the past. Willard L. Boyd has discussed how we think of museums as places of objects when, in fact, 'they are places of ideas.' Ideas, he argues, 'are the principle means by which humans interact with objects in museums.' Boyd goes further in arguing our ideas about objects change as our knowledge and attitudes develop.<sup>264</sup> This supports a notion that our ideas about an object of the past are very much pivoted in the present and, thus, are largely disconnected from the objects themselves.

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<sup>260</sup>Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution*, 162.

<sup>261</sup>"Kaufbeuren-Irsee," Lutz Kaelber, accessed February, 2013, <http://www.uvm.edu/~lkaelber/children/kaufbeurenirsee/kaufbeurenirsee.html>.

<sup>262</sup>Michael Von Cranach launched the exhibition *In Memoriam*, which aimed to document the Nazi histories of psychiatric hospital. He claimed to be reflecting 'about the most difficult of all questions: How could such a thing happen?' (Quoted from a leaflet on the exhibition, *In Memoriam*, August 6 1999).

<sup>263</sup>Julie Cruikshank, "Oral Tradition and Material Culture: Multiplying Meanings of 'Words' and 'Things,'" *Anthropology Today* 8, No. 3 (June 1992): 6.

<sup>264</sup>Willard L. Boyd, "Museums as Centers of Controversy," *Daedalus* 128, No. 3 America's Museums (Summer 1999): 185.

'Shown here is a dissection table from the Kaufbeuren-Irsee psychiatric hospital near Munich...'<sup>265</sup> Exhibiting the table in London

The white marble dissecting table found in Kaufbeuren-Irsee was unquestionably an important acquisition for the IWMHE. Bardgett claimed that 'editorially it would [...] obviously be a very strong and effective last thing seen on the Upper Floor.'<sup>266</sup> In a letter from HEPO to Georg Simnacher, president of the district of Schwaben from 1974-2003 (the location of Kaufbeuren-Irsee), Simnacher was asked of the possibility of a loan on this important object:

We found the dissection table in Irsee [...] was particularly impressive and suited to represent the horrors of the Euthanasia. Euthanasia is a subject which needs to be illustrated mainly by documents and photos. Therefore, the dissection table would be, because of its concreteness, a very suitable exhibit.<sup>267</sup>

Referring to the dissection table in terms of its 'concreteness' touches upon the perceived suitability of tangible artefacts to represent the Holocaust, and to act as a 'material witness' to the past. The historical narrative presented within the IWMHE is legitimised through the dissection table as it acts as authentic evidence to the truth claims of the institution. Objects are part of, and thus reaffirm, the way things are. That is, the power of the object to naturalise the narrative is partly down to the museum's emphasis on authenticity and 'aura', 'thereby forging an effective connection based on empathy and identification.' Such exhibits', Jennifer Hansen-Glucklich argues, 'seek to transform passive spectators into involved and concerned Holocaust witnesses.'<sup>268</sup> Suzanne Bardgett claimed to have plenty of 'flat evidence' in terms of documents and photographs, however HEPO were eager to secure a number of sizeable three-dimensional objects,<sup>269</sup> of which the dissection table was one. The inclusion of large artefacts is, in practical terms, essential for adding variety and pace to the exhibition. The dissection table was intended to jar the visitor at the top of a staircase leading down towards the outbreak of war. There is a sense of immense gravity here, generated by the positioning of the dissection table as the last exhibit the visitor reaches before descending into the war years. The letters, documents and photographs provide background and context, however the table is largely responsible for a feeling of

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<sup>265</sup> Text from the IWMHE display.

<sup>266</sup> Letter from Suzanne Bardgett to Bob Baxter RE Dissecting table from Kaufbeuren, June 15, 1998.

<sup>267</sup> Translation of a letter from the IWM to Dr. Simnacher, June 19, 1998, Section Files: Dissection Table, Holocaust Exhibition Archive, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>268</sup> Hansen-Glucklich, *Holocaust Memory Reframed*, 142.

<sup>269</sup> Bardgett, "The Material Culture of Persecution," 21-22.

unease among visitors. The table was intended to provide 'an indication of the barbaric route which events will take on the Lower Floor.'<sup>270</sup>

The sense of unease created at this 'crisis point' in the exhibition reaches beyond the historical narrative presented. The dissection table has been incorporated into, what is arguably, a well-trodden narrative of the treatment of psychiatric patients in Germany during the Nazi period; with the intention of providing 'concrete' evidence of the 'barbarity' of Nazi crimes. The table in its former location was used as the basis of a memorial to the treatment of psychiatric patients within the institution it was located, as well as a part of the 11th World Congress of Psychiatry proceedings in Hamburg in 1999. It was not to be used to depict the 'barbarity' of their crimes, this would be an unproductive approach in this context, but to challenge the 'roots and causes of such inhumane behaviour'<sup>271</sup> and to question '[h]ow such a thing could happen'.<sup>272</sup> Its situation within the IWMHE presents an uncomfortable challenge as both the site of the former Bethlem Psychiatric Hospital and as a museum of modern warfare. Some concerns were raised by Simnacher as to, firstly why a Holocaust exhibition was to be proposed within a war museum and, secondly, how the table would be used within this context. In an attempt to satisfy such concerns, the IWM's then director general, Robert Crawford outlined the Holocaust exhibition project and why this particular object was of such importance to the design:

The Exhibition will be laid out on two floors and will cover 1,400 qm, the upper floor dealing with the period 1933 to 1939, the lower floor with the war years, so that there is a literal descent into the war years. "Euthanasia" is the last subject on the upper floor and plays a particularly important role as it leads over to the outbreak of war and to physical destruction.<sup>273</sup>

While Crawford offered a sound report on the context of the table, he fails to acknowledge why a Holocaust exhibition was proposed within a museum of war. There appeared to be a general consensus on the suitability of the museum to host an exhibition on this theme, but little thought appears to have been put into how this context affects the public perception of the event. Simnacher quite rightly identifies an issue of contextualisation for the table,

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<sup>270</sup> Letter from Robert Crawford to Ambassador Gebhardt Von Moltke, October 29, 1998, Section Files: Dissection Table, Holocaust Exhibition Archive, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>271</sup> Henning Saß, "Foreword" In *In Memoriam: Exhibition Commemorating the Victims of the Nazi Euthanasia Program on the Occasion of the XI World Congress of Psychiatry, Hamburg, 1999* Exhibition catalogue, 7.

<sup>272</sup> Michael von Cranach, *In Memoriam: Exhibition Commemorating the Victims of the Nazi Euthanasia Program on the Occasion of the XI World Congress of Psychiatry, Hamburg, 1999*, Exhibition catalogue, 9,

<sup>273</sup> Translation of a letter from Robert Crawford to Dr. Simnacher, February 12, 1999, Section Files: Dissection Table, Holocaust Exhibition Archive, Imperial War Museum, London.

which suggests an understanding of how it may be misinterpreted within the IWM's proposed context. From Crawford's explanatory letter, there is a suggestion the table be used to simplistically convey a prelude to physical destruction; that is, the table will quickly and effectively convey to visitors the seriousness of what is to follow. This completely changes the dynamics of the table's previous display context as the only three-dimensional artefact to depict the actions of Nazi doctors. But, further than this, it fails to consider its location within the former psychiatric hospital and how this raises important questions for the treatment of psychiatric patients in Britain. Arguably the IWM is not the context within which to openly discuss the treatment of psychiatric patients, however the inclusion of this artefact within a narrative of psychiatric care raises difficult questions and creates a discomfort within the display. The dissection table as a part of the IWMHE display acts as a reification of Nazi evil, however it also presents an opportunity to engage on a deeper level with how we understand objects and environments to challenge the broader context of Holocaust history and British connections. What is at stake here is our ability to question ourselves within the parameters of the exhibition, which would defy the simplistic 'good versus evil' paradigm. Rather than transporting visitors into the historical world of the museum, the historical world of the museum would be brought into the present lives of the visitors. This encourages the kinds of questions that influenced the display in Kaufbeuren, a form of self-questioning that enables progression. Under such circumstances visitors are able to consider what the exhibition means for them in a more personal and thought-provoking way, and to challenge their own self-understandings in relation to the past. This has the potential of avoiding a common, though largely superficial, response of 'never again' as it encourages productive connections between past and present. The interaction between memories (and narratives) is explored in detail by Michael Rothberg in a discussion of memory's multidirectionality. Here Rothberg argues that widespread public consciousness of the Holocaust can create an opening for debates of other traumatic pasts and presents. He argues that one memory need not replace another but can usefully engage with it - using the Holocaust as a platform.<sup>274</sup> This is relevant as it indicates a presentness of the past and an opportunity for a more productive use of the Holocaust within the context of the IWM.

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<sup>274</sup> See Michael Rothberg *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the age of Decolonization* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2009)

### 'Bringing the Holocaust home': Holocaust artefacts in a British context

Tim Cole has argued that a process of nativisation takes place when the Holocaust is remembered within a specific local context. The specific local context of the Holocaust within Britain's national Imperial War Museum demands a dual consideration: Firstly, the memory of the Holocaust within a national museum in Britain and, secondly, memory of the Holocaust within a museum of modern warfare. The decision to create Britain's most important display on the Holocaust within an existing museum focusing on wars in which Britain and the Commonwealth have been involved since 1917 was not without consequence. Suzanne Bardgett has claimed that creating the exhibition within the existing parameters of the museum was, on the whole, helpful rather than restrictive. It would allow the First and Second World Wars to act as 'staging posts' that would shape the history presented within the exhibition. In a BBB2 documentary presented as part of a 'remembrance season' in 1995 by historian (and later advisor the IWMHE), David Cesarani, Cesarani claimed that establishing a museum dedicated to the Holocaust would 'challenge the cosy mythology of Britain at war and bring the Jewish experience into proper perspective.'<sup>275</sup> He argued the Holocaust is a part of British history, and not something that stands apart from it. The Jewish experience of the Nazi period had been marginalised within British museums such as the IWM, Cesarani claimed, except as an afterthought.<sup>276</sup> This began to change, however, with a rise in public interest of the Holocaust; particularly after the public commemorations of the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz in 1995. Here the Holocaust became absorbed into Britain's war narrative and the future shape of Holocaust memory would be secured; the Holocaust as a part of British Second World War history became naturalised.<sup>277</sup> Aligning a historical narrative of the Holocaust with Second World War history propelled it from the margins of public consciousness into a central theme of British war memory, but this inevitably impacts how the Holocaust is or can be remembered. Memory of war in British culture is precious, indicated through the establishment of an Imperial War Museum (now several Imperial War Museums) and the yearly commemorations on Remembrance Sunday. That memory of war in Britain is largely predicated on a moral justification for sacrifice and suffering eschews any reading of the Holocaust that would potentially challenge this position. If the Second World War is

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<sup>275</sup> David Cesarani, *Bringing the Holocaust Home*.

<sup>276</sup> David Cesarani, *Bringing the Holocaust Home*.

<sup>277</sup> See Judith Petersen, "How British Television Inserted the Holocaust into Britain's War Memory in 1995," *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television* 21, no. 3 (2001): 225-272.

understood as a fight of good versus evil then the Holocaust convincingly demonstrates the nature of that evil.

Isabel Wollaston has argued that a 'rhetoric of remembrance emerges that is taken to be self-evident by both speakers and audience in a particular community.' Many of these meanings, she argues,

are constructed in exclusive terms, as the one true account of what happened and why, as the only true meaning within the plethora of conflicting possibilities, the one that demands the allegiance of the 'true' believer. The problem is that, given the multiplicity of events covered by the blanket-term "Holocaust" and the variety of perspectives brought to them, both by those who were there and those who came after, the Holocaust can seemingly point everywhere and anywhere. It can now "mean" just about anything.<sup>278</sup>

Two decades on from the original proposal of the IWMHE and the 'rhetoric of remembrance' within Britain remains firmly grounded within the narrative of war, seemingly without question to alternative interpretations. That Simnacher would raise concerns over how a war museum could effectively represent the Holocaust is demonstrative of the unnaturalness of this position. As Wollaston has highlighted, the Holocaust today can mean just about anything, it can mean a multitude of different things at once, and this demands further consideration within a British context.

It may be argued that memory of the Holocaust within the IWMHE embodies a kind of hybridity. That is, it is impossible to claim an entirely British interpretation is expressed through the displays, but the Holocaust within its European context has been incorporated into a specifically British framework. In terms of artefacts within the IWMHE, many are displayed out of context; they do not, in a sense, 'belong' in Britain and thus any meanings inscribed are instantly artificial. Each artefact, through its displacement and re-placement, introduces a particular version of the Holocaust as it is presented within its new context. Here we may consider the performance of an artefact; it is expected to act in a particular way and this is scripted through the exhibition's narrative. This brings into question the ownership of Holocaust objects, and the idea of where they belong. The dissection table explored in detail above was in 1998, and again in 2005, the subject of a controversy over where such an item belongs. In a letter from Robert Crawford to German ambassador

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<sup>278</sup> Isabel Wollaston, "'A War Against Memory'? Nativizing the Holocaust," in *Remembering for the Future: The Holocaust in an Age of Genocide 3*, Memory, ed. John K. Roth and Elisabeth Maxwell (London: Palgrave, 2001), 502.

Gebhardt Von Moltke, Crawford reveals the lengths to which the IWM were willing to go to secure the dissection table for the permanent exhibition,

My reason for writing to you is that we understand that Dr Georg Simnacher [...] is to convene a meeting on 7 December to decide whether or not the table should be lent to this museum. There is – understandably – a certain amount of feeling in the district that the dissecting table should remain in Germany.

We find ourselves in the difficult position of wishing to borrow something which is clearly valued at a local level in Germany, and in normal circumstances I would hesitate to press this matter. However, the key role which the dissecting table would play, coupled with the fact that the Exhibition will present the history of the Holocaust to some half a million visitors to the museum each year, persuades me that this is one occasion where we should take the matter up at a high level and see what possible influence you might be able to bring on the authorities to agree to this loan.<sup>279</sup>

For Robert Crawford and, by extension, the IWM, the lending of the dissection table to an exhibition in London was justified through the central role it would play in depicting the Holocaust and the vast number of visitors that would encounter it. The loan was initially rejected on the grounds it was to be used for a special exhibition in Germany, but this issue was pressed by the IWM and, with the help of the ambassador, a five year loan was agreed. As the end of the loan approached, the IWM applied to keep the table permanently but the director of the conference centre, Rainer Jehl, declined this request. Again, the IWM contacted the German ambassador in London for support, however the table was finally returned to Irsee.<sup>280</sup> There was little respect given to the important role such an artefact plays within its original context and the implications of its removal. The temporary loan left a five-year void in memory at Irsee while the table was placed in London. When the table was returned, the IWMHE commissioned an exact replica to replace the original within the display.

The void in memory is an interesting concept when discussing memory of the Holocaust, which is itself predicated on such voids. There are far more gaps in memory than can be accounted for through memory-work resulting from the destruction and loss of entire communities. This has been represented in many forms including art, literature, and architecture; one of the most notable representations being the design of the Jewish Museum, Berlin by Daniel Libeskind. Here a series of 'voids' run through the central portion of the building; with no heating or natural light to these corridors they are literal voids

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<sup>279</sup> Letter from Robert Crawford to Ambassador Gebhardt Von Moltke, October 29, 1998, Section Files: Dissection Table, Holocaust Exhibition Archive, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>280</sup> Michael von Cranach, in conversation with author. June 25, 2013.

within the building representing an emptiness, something missing. Such voids are also created through the movement of Holocaust objects, from their removal to their replacement. A funeral cart displayed within the ghettos section of the IWMHE was regarded by its owners, a Jewish cemetery in Poland, as a precious item, though they agreed a loan of five years. The cart was considered a

priceless heirloom for the Jewish cemetery, not only because of its pedigree and historical importance, but also because it is still in use for burials. After the war this cart was sought out and discovered by my father, Pinkus Szenicer, of blessed memory, and subsequently bought by him. In inclining ourselves towards your request we propose lending the cart for the exhibition for five years (to 2005) with the absolute condition that it should not undergo any renovation in England.<sup>281</sup>

To fill the void left by the loaning of this 'precious item', the IWM purchased a substitute cart so the cemetery could continue its work for the duration of the loan. The funeral cart from Warsaw had been used in the Warsaw ghetto to collect bodies of the deceased. What makes this a particularly interesting artefact is that it did not exist within a world of disowned, discarded, or collected remnants as many Holocaust objects do, but it was, until its arrival in the IWMHE, a fully functioning, utilised tool. Only on arriving at the Holocaust exhibition did it cease to become 'useful' in the same sense. On arrival at the exhibition it became transported back to a previous life to pose stagnantly as an artefact from the Warsaw ghetto. Where for many Holocaust objects their inclusion within a museum exhibition gives them a renewed purpose - that is, they become 'useful' again as objects of interest and enquiry (their importance inflated through their context as the one example on show) - for the Polish funeral cart, the inclusion in the museum resulted in a break in usage, to be rendered rather more useless other than as an object to signify a past world.

Artefacts are acquired and staged in such a way as to demystify the Holocaust. There is an inherent belief, and reasonable expectation, that visiting any museum will result in learning and understanding more on the subject exhibited. To encounter artefacts, then, is to gain a certain level of understanding even if, particularly in the case of the Holocaust, this is not complete comprehension. Jennifer Hansen-Glucklich discusses the museum objective to amass vast numbers of artefacts 'to create a coherent narrative of the Holocaust', acknowledging this is fraught with difficulties.<sup>282</sup> To amass more artefacts, it is believed, is to gain a greater knowledge of the past. By this logic the more one collects, the more one

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<sup>281</sup> Translation of a letter from the director of the Jewish Cemetery in Warsaw, Bolesław Szenicer, November 23, 1998, Section Files: Ghettos, Holocaust Exhibition Archive, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>282</sup> Hansen-Glucklich, *Holocaust Memory Reframed*, 143.



'knows' of the past. This suggests the Holocaust can be 'known' through the surviving material remnants. The objects become not only material witnesses of the Holocaust but, in the context of museum display, they become sites of memory in themselves; or as Pierre Nora has defined *lieux de mémoire*, 'where memory crystallizes and secretes itself'.<sup>283</sup> *Lieux de mémoire* remind us of the past, but they are not the past. While the concept has been widely used to discuss traditional sites of memory, such as former Nazi concentration camps and memorials, it can also be productively applied to tangible remnants of the past. These are not real environments of memory, or *milieux de mémoire*, but represent, in Nora's words, memory torn. Musealised artefacts of the Holocaust work in place of real environments, assisting a kind of forgetting. The artefacts appear to promise the real, or a certain authenticity, however they are constructions that stand in for perceived 'realities' whilst camouflaging their constructedness.

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<sup>283</sup> Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire," *Representations* 26 (Spring 1989): 7.

**Holocaust Survivor Testimonies: Narrative, Memory and Identity in the Museum**

This chapter will offer an exploration of how Holocaust testimonies are used within the IWMHE. The role of the survivor within the context of a national museum is considered, how personal testimony is used within a public exhibition space, and how such testimonies contribute towards the construction of memory through this particular site. It shall discuss the translation of personal recollections of Holocaust survivors into a national museum in Britain as they are situated at the juncture between history and memory. The historical narrative of the Holocaust exhibition shapes the story presented through the survivors' memories and this study aims to illuminate the process by which memories of another time and place become meaningful for the present and in an entirely new (distant) place. Addressing the construction of Holocaust memory through survivor testimonies within the IWMHE, it explores the shaping of survivors' words within the context of the museum and how survivor voices are used to tell a specific version of the Holocaust story.

Annette Wieviorka has argued that testimonies

express the discourse of discourses valued by society at the moment the witnesses tell their stories as much as they render an individual experience. In principle, testimonies demonstrate that every individual, every life, every experience of the Holocaust is irreducibly unique. But they demonstrate this uniqueness using the language of the time in which they are delivered and in response to questions and expectations motivated by political and ideological concerns. Consequently, despite their uniqueness, testimonies come to participate in a collective memory - or collective memories - that vary in their form, function, and in the implicit or explicit aims they set for themselves.<sup>284</sup>

Historians have traditionally approached testimony with caution, highlighting the holes and misunderstandings in personal recollections of the past. Testimony is still, though perhaps less so now, treated with mistrust in the museum and used only to add a further layer of evidence to an existing narrative. This chapter explores the use of 16 survivor testimonies within the IWMHE. It questions the way they are shaped and framed in an institutional context, and how they contribute to the construction of Holocaust memory within Britain's permanent national Holocaust exhibition. It explores the relationship between Holocaust survivor testimony within the IWMHE and Holocaust discourse, addressing how testimony is used to express and support the narratives presented by the IWMHE. In turn, it assesses

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<sup>284</sup> Annette Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness* (London: Cornell University Press, 2006). xii.

what this reveals about how knowledge is shaped through testimony as an expression of the values and beliefs of a particular time and place.

The Eichmann trial in Jerusalem in 1961 has been credited with providing Holocaust survivors with the first large-scale public platform beyond the Jewish world. It is pertinent that the first major representation of survivors was within a legal framework, shaping the way testimony was, and is, used and understood for the following decades. Testimony acts as evidence of what happened, spoken in the words of people who experienced and witnessed events that come to be known as the Holocaust first-hand. When recording survivor testimonies for the IWMHE, witnesses (in this case exclusively Holocaust survivors) were asked direct questions by an interviewer and offer responses that contribute to a rebuilding of the events within the exhibition. It is important to acknowledge that what is rebuilt through the act of giving testimony cannot be the same as the events themselves. Certain aspects of the past are lost to memory, perception, or are simply deemed irrelevant (by the interviewee) in the retelling of the past. It should be noted, that while the Eichmann trial gained vital ground in popularising the Holocaust survivor and bringing their testimonies into wider public recognition, in terms of forwarding a case for aligning the Holocaust with popular memory of the Second World War in Britain, it made very little impact. As Tony Kushner has observed, a major Holocaust exhibition or museum in Britain seemed a pipe dream as late as the early 1990s given, up until this point, 'the major site of British memory in relation to World War II, the Imperial War Museum, hardly mentioned the fate of the Jews.' It became apparent to Kushner that the Eichmann trial 'may have put in the British public domain the historical details of the Holocaust, but its longer-term impact was no more than a minor ripple.'<sup>285</sup> Seen in this light, the Eichmann trial succeeded in bringing the historical detail of the Holocaust to the British public, however it failed to initiate any long term provisions for education and memorialisation more broadly. In terms of illuminating the debate on the creation of a Holocaust museum, as Kushner stated, the impact was incredibly limited. In the context of this chapter, the Eichmann trial is discussed for its influence on catapulting the survivor into the public sphere rather than for the trial's influence on Holocaust memorialisation in Britain more generally.

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<sup>285</sup> Tony Kushner 'Too Little, Too Late? Reflections on Britain's Holocaust Memorial Day' *Journal of Israeli History* 23:1 (2004) 116

An increased interest in survivor testimony throughout the 1970s and 1980s resulted in the heightened profile of the survivor as a key element in Holocaust memory and representation. Despite an increased interest in the stories told, however, the survivor was still treated with caution and used merely to supplement the written record rather than provide the foundation for a master historical narrative. This largely remains the same today as oral histories are archived in the hundreds of thousands globally, accessible to the wider public selectively through popular or notable themes. While the public have open access to the majority of the recorded oral testimonies, their way of searching archives and the material easily accessible through public museums and exhibitions has made certain testimonies (or part testimonies) more accessible than others. For instance, to search a database of recorded testimonies thematically requires prior knowledge of the subject so as to know exactly what search terms to apply. There is far too much material available to simply listen to or watch all available testimonies. Those made prominent have been subjected to a strict criteria, such as whether the survivor provides clarity through the text; that is, in practical terms, whether they are heavily accented so as to make understanding difficult, or whether their testimony describes such appalling or alien experiences the listener would have difficulty in comprehension. There are also those stories that problematise the accepted historical narrative, which remain largely unexplored within Holocaust representation.

To explore the disparity between the narratives presented to museum exhibition visitors and the narratives presented by the survivor, the transcripts of the original October Films interviews and transcripts from the final edit are assessed here. This allows us to consider how Holocaust memory is constructed within an institutional context (that is, actively remembered in Aleida Assman's definition of cultural memory; those memories that are of use to a society) and how this relates to (and directly affects) the lived memories of Holocaust survivors. The IWMHE introduces visitors to 19 (only 16 were filmed for the video monitors) Holocaust survivors throughout the displays: Kitty Hart-Moxon, Lili Pohlmann, Freddie Knoller, Ruth Foster, Esther Brunstein, Rudy Kennedy, Hugo Gryn, Barbara Stimler, Daniel Falkner, Edyta Klein-Smith, Rudi Bamber, Tauba (Toby) Biber, Beate (Bea) Green, Roman Halter, and Ezra Jurmann are all classified as Jewish survivors. Albin (Alex) Ossowski and Maria Ossowski were arrested for suspected involvement in the Polish resistance, Premysl Dobias was arrested for helping Jews and Magdalena Kusserov survived the Holocaust as a Jehovah's witness. The vast majority of witnesses included within the exhibition are Jewish, with 'others' represented through political prisoners and a

conscientious objector. Suzanne Bardgett has noted her regret at not being able to portray a homosexual or gypsy survivor through testimony. This was largely due to practical considerations. When planning for the exhibition and testimony films, English speaking gypsy or homosexual survivors of the Holocaust could not be readily identified and the curatorial team did not want to produce films that contained subtitling for the purpose of clarity.<sup>286</sup> A number of the survivors filmed, such as Kitty Hart-Moxon, Freddie Knoller and Roman Halter, were already known through the British media and had given testimony elsewhere. There would, therefore, be a certain familiarity with the survivors in the exhibition.

Visitors are introduced to 16 out of the 19 survivors in the opening cone of the exhibition. Appearing on a monitor surrounded by pre-war family photographs of those who later became Holocaust victims, the intention is to demonstrate to the visitor the many different people that were affected by Nazi persecution. The aim is to highlight that class, occupation, levels of religious observance or circumstance had very little impact on those targeted by the Nazis, Jews were targeted simply for being Jewish. The survivors and, by extension, victims of the Holocaust are defined as a disparate group sharing a common past. Each survivor describes an aspect of their childhood before the arrival of the Nazis and here the differences between the survivors is stressed. Kitty Hart-Moxon describes her disdain for her nannies (signifying a wealthy upbringing), while Daniel Faulkner describes his family as being on 'the edge of utter poverty.' Lili Pohlman discusses her mother's promise to visit parents for Passover, where Edyta Klein-Smith talks of family holidays and her mother's love of casino gambling. Edyta Klein-Smith's life story had already been recorded for the IWM sound archive, and she had been chosen for her ability to clearly convey her experience to thousands of museum visitors. October Films were aware of what experiences could best illustrate the exhibition's master narrative and thus were specific in their questioning. While the exhibition was to offer a chronological approach to the history, the interviews did not, with accounts jumping from childhood, to during the Holocaust and then back to before the arrival of the Nazis. Knowing where the testimony would fit in narrative terms, James Barker of October Films asked Edyta Klein-Smith towards the end of her interview (after having discussed the process of ghettoisation), to 'take a leap back now to your childhood'.<sup>287</sup> Barker specifically wanted Edyta Klein-Smith to discuss days spent in Supult, a holiday destination for Edyta and her family. This would form a part of the

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<sup>286</sup> Suzanne Bardgett, in conversation with author, August 27, 2015.

<sup>287</sup> Transcript of October Films interview with Edyta Klein-Smith, Roll #43 I/V, 1999, Holocaust Exhibition Archive, Department of Research, Imperial War Museum, London.

testimony in the opening cone of the exhibition. It came towards the end of Edyta's interview as the interviewer recapped over her story and attempted to gain useful information that could be incorporated into the exhibition's display. The gathering of statements in this way for use within the final display results in the decontextualisation of the survivors' words, the testimonies gathered do not follow a linear narrative.

The testimonies recorded and displayed within the IWMHE offer a significant departure from the traditional video testimony format. Video testimonies, such as those recorded for the Shoah Foundation, are largely an opportunity for Holocaust survivors to record their life histories. Unscripted, interviewers are expected to gently guide the survivor through his or her own experiences; allowing the interviewee to take the lead. This was not the format applied by October Films, those responsible for the survivor interviews at the IWMHE. Here the interviewer, James Barker, actively shaped the recollections provided by the survivor, and fully intended to do so. The purpose of this footage was not to record the survivor's life story, but to select relevant aspects of life stories to suit the aims and intentions of the permanent Holocaust exhibition.

James Young has questioned how memory of the survivors will (or will not) enter the historical record.<sup>288</sup> Survivor testimonies are vital not only for our understanding of the historical events they discuss, but for our understanding of how these events were experienced and are remembered by the people involved. It is not the historical events themselves that are noteworthy when discussing testimony, but the impact these events had on individuals. The testimony is used within the IWMHE to present the impact of Nazi actions on real lives, the point at which history and memory collide and intersect within the museum. In accordance with the museum's wider remit, the focus of the permanent Holocaust exhibition within the IWM was to be on the individual experiences of war, of which the Holocaust survivor could provide an authoritative voice. The Holocaust survivors appearing in video format throughout the exhibition represent the Holocaust victim in contemporary form, providing an 'authentic' persona for the overarching narrative of the institution. Employed to provide a layer of evidence, the 16 Holocaust survivors appear at regular intervals in the exhibition and it is expected that visitors will recognise each survivor individually by the exhibition's close. However, while it is intended that visitor's 'get to

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<sup>288</sup> James Young, "Between History and Memory: The Uncanny Voices of Historian and Survivor," *History and Memory* 9, no. 1-2, *Passing into History: Nazism and the Holocaust Beyond Memory*, in Honor of Saul Friedlander on His Sixty-Fifth Birthday, (1997): 49.

know' the witnesses in a certain sense, not one individual story is seen through from beginning to end. The testimonies are moulded to provide one authoritative voice on the topic, each story told reaffirms an aspect of the exhibition's display and master narrative. The intention for visitors to see the effects of each element in the story (life before the Nazis, outcasts, terror strikes Poland, ghettoisation, deportation, Auschwitz, the camp system, discovery of the crimes, and reflections) on individual lives is realised, but at the cost of a nuanced understanding of victim experiences. Small sections of lengthy interviews with the survivors are edited together to provide a homogenised retelling of the Holocaust from an eye-witness perspective, yet this 'authoritative voice' has been sculpted by a team of curators and designers within a national museum with its own agenda. Tony Kushner has discussed the use of survivor testimony within the IWMHE and questions whether there is value in such testimonies used in truncated form.<sup>289</sup> The original integrity of the testimony is questionable when sentences and paragraphs are decontextualised and recontextualised within a museum environment. Kushner questions whether 'the nuance and ambiguities of life history can be suitably represented in a museum setting' and how such interviews are carried out and will be utilised in the future. Kushner goes further to state that while a concerted effort has been made to collect and record hundreds of thousands of Holocaust testimonies, less thought has been afforded the use of such testimony; particularly within the public sphere.<sup>290</sup> Hundreds of thousands of hours worth of Holocaust survivor testimonies have now been recorded and archived for potential use in the future, however few people outside of a scholarly context are asking what this material is to be used for or why it has become necessary to record many hours of testimony repeating the same narratives and using the same key words. Many survivors have been repeatedly interviewed, each time answering the same questions and offering the same insights into their lives.

Arguably the narrative offered by the IWMHE could be considered detached and impersonal if not for the humanising effect of the survivor testimony presented on audio-visual monitors. The use of real people in ordinary settings in the video testimony allows visitors to relate to the victim experience, to identify with the victims, in a way that could not be possible through images and footage from the Holocaust period alone. It provides a point of contact with the visitor in which they appear in conditions that are comprehensible to the visiting public. The survivors were interviewed at the Holocaust Survivors' Centre in

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<sup>289</sup> See Tony Kushner, "Oral History at the Extremes of Human Experience: Holocaust Testimony in a Museum Setting," *Oral History* 29, no. 2 (2001): 83-94.

<sup>290</sup> Kushner, "Oral History at the Extremes of Human Experience," 84.

London, in a neutral room that is undistinguishable from a modern living room. This location was selected as a means of putting the survivors at ease throughout their interviews. It was a location the interviewees were familiar with and a surrounding in which they could comfortably tell their stories. It was important for the IWM to gain the trust of the survivors if they were to provide sufficient material for the exhibition's proposed films. It was also important the setting did not jar with the visitors' understanding of the victim as 'just like us', to reinforce a message that this could happen to anyone at any time (taking a universalist perspective). On the opening of the IWMHE in 2000, images of victims during the Holocaust had the ability to shock far more so than they do today, resulting in the visiting public failing to make any connections between the history presented and their own life-worlds. Within the context of a national exhibition (particularly one receiving public funding) the exhibition needed to connect to the present lives of the visitors in a meaningful way.

What needs to be questioned further is the assumption that Holocaust survivors provide an authoritative voice on the Holocaust experience within the museum space. This is not to question the integrity of the testimony itself, but its use within an exhibitionary context. What is lost through the editing process should be considered in greater detail, and how this shapes future memory of the Holocaust in Britain beyond the survivor. With narratives shaped by the IWM, can the memories portrayed in the video testimonies be considered the survivors' own, or are they a version of personal memory made usable for the consuming collective? The stories survivors tell, the way they are told and the way institutions and organisations edit and present testimonies will directly impact how future generations remember the events of the Holocaust. Many aspects of the survivors' lives, their retelling of their pasts, and their presentation within the IWM may be considered specifically British in their framing. All survivors selected for inclusion within the final display came to Britain after the war and (largely) remained in Britain for the duration of their adult lives. This undoubtedly has an impact on the stories they have to tell and on the impressions of Britain and the British experience they chose to project. The testimonies need to be considered as a product of their time and place - late 1990s, IWM London- but this does not eliminate the urgency to address how these testimonies (and their public display) will impact the future of Holocaust memory nationally and transnationally.

The testimonies within the IWMHE are restrictive in the sense that they do not allow the survivor's own story to dominate. Survivor's were interviewed in such a way that certain



elements to their stories, certain key words, key dates, and places were highlighted, which would influence the direction of the stories being told. The impetus lies with the IWM, they are responsible for the narratives of the survivors' life stories. While survivors remain the experts on their own life stories, the IWM take each story and turn it into a usable past for the purpose of the exhibition. What the interviewer needed for the video recording became of paramount importance, and ultimately affected how the survivor stories will be stored and remembered in the future. The balance of control over the life story shifts from the survivor as he or she tells their narrative to the interviewer as they attempt to extract a very particular version of the past. The survivor stories are therefore shaped to fit within a preconceived vision of the victim experience of the Holocaust, largely based on historical research rather than on discussions with witnesses themselves.

It is important to point out here the choices each witness makes in the retelling of their story is in part dictated by audience expectation. What the witness believes is relevant to the story is, in part, culturally defined and thus can be considered a part of Holocaust culture in Britain. What are the aspects of the story that are important to the interviewers and the survivors here? On page 37 of Roman Halter's interview, the interviewer, historian James Barker of October Films, asks Roman what he thinks the British should know about. The interviewer purposely frames the interview to suit a local audience. James Barker asks Roman Halter, 'What particular lessons do you think that - that we in this country, which obviously was involved in the war - but wasn't itself fortunately invaded by the Germans - what do you think the British need to know about?' Roman Halter's response, which does not feature in the final Holocaust exhibition, states

To understand the reality of the past in its essentials, not to romanticise - either war or murder, or what happens - not to hero worship people - because they were charismatic dictators - I think, er - really history has to be understood in its naked form, I went as a matter of interest to see, er, the D-Day landings - and I stood there on the beaches and I looked at Omaha, and looked at all these stretches of beaches, and I thought to myself, this battle must have been terrible - and yet I remember a film with Kenneth Moore standing with a bulldog, saying come on Scheps, come on Scheps - now Spielberg has done a film, and I went to see it, and I thought this film of Rescuing Private Ryan [sic] rings true - at least the first part of it - the slaughter, the massacre, the cruelty - on both sides.<sup>291</sup>

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<sup>291</sup> Transcript of Roman Halter's interview, Holocaust Exhibition Archive, Imperial War Museum, London.

Roman Halter believes history should be understood in its 'naked form', including those elements that are problematic or potentially contentious. This is something the IWMHE avoids by not engaging with British narratives of the Holocaust.

Memory of the Holocaust is shaped through the collection of Holocaust witness testimonies, survivor, perpetrator and bystander testimonies, and the questions asked of these witnesses dictates how future generations will recall the events of the past. The development of the Holocaust survivor within British culture is a direct response to the Holocaust survivor in culture more broadly. The prominence of the Holocaust survivor within the IWMHE defies the original intentions of the exhibition curators to exclude them from the presentation completely. Holocaust project director, Suzanne Bardgett claimed there was some trepidation over whether survivors should be used within the exhibition at all, fearing visitors would assume survival was the norm or that the appearance of elderly survivors would place them out of touch with younger museum goers. Survivors voices, despite their prevalence in Holocaust memorial culture in Britain today (illustrated through their presence at official memorial events such as those for Holocaust Memorial Day), have not always been present. It did not seem a natural step to incorporate testimonies into the IWMHE in the mid 1990s, while today to exclude them would seem, as Donald Bloxham has attested, 'absurd and distasteful [...] a crime without victims.'<sup>292</sup> There was, and still remains, a general mistrust of witness testimonies in terms of their reliability as historical documents. This is reaffirmed through the use of testimonies within the IWMHE as they are used only as supporting illustrative pieces rather than as historical documentation in their own right. The Holocaust witness is treated with suspicion as their testimony is considered potentially skewed and highly subjective, traits that are incompatible with the IWMHE approach to Holocaust history as detached and authoritative.

British documentary films had played an important role in bringing the survivor voice to the IWMHE. It had been decided early on in the planning stages that film would make up an important part of the exhibition, particularly if the museum would have to rely on the sparse physical material contained in its archive. Suzanne Bardgett had thought a well-conceived film could provide the draw an exhibition of this nature would need.<sup>293</sup> As discussions were underway with October Films, they had been eager to include video testimonies with survivors. This had been a format that had worked well in Laurence Rees'

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<sup>292</sup> Donald Bloxham, "Britain's Holocaust Memorial Days: Reshaping the Past in the Service of the Present," *Immigrants and Minorities* 21, no. 1-2 (2002): 46.

<sup>293</sup> Suzanne Bardgett in conversation with author, August 27, 2015.

documentary *The Nazis: A Warning From History* (1997), a documentary that had been screened to the HEPO and from which they had all taken inspiration for the drafting of the exhibition. Bardgett could see how this approach might translate in museum terms, though she admits to not having been entirely convinced until completion of the final footage.<sup>294</sup>

The IWMHE opens with survivors, attesting to the important role they play in the story of the Holocaust presented here; the Holocaust survivor offers a crucial presence throughout the exhibition. Despite being perpetrator-led, the narrative relies on the Holocaust survivor to provide the antithesis to the Nazi perpetrator, thus avoiding the presentation of the crime without the victim. But does this position provide a satisfactory platform for the Holocaust survivor? Suzanne Bardgett claims survivors were happy with the final edit of the testimony films that were to be included within the exhibition's display, they had been offered a preview of the edited clips as one continuous film prior to the opening of the exhibition. There were no official complaints to argue the contrary, however this speaks volumes over the accepted position of Holocaust survivors, or survivors of genocide more broadly, within British society and culture. The 'privileged status' granted to the testimonies of victims and survivors as being those who can only ever 'truly know'<sup>295</sup> is manipulated when contextualised within the IWMHE. The knowledge they share through their filmed testimony is sculpted through the editing process and for purposes that exist externally to the interviewed survivor. The knowledge then constructed by the filmmakers, and the museum by extension, is awarded this 'privileged status' without upholding the original integrity of the survivor narratives. It is not argued here that the IWM, along with October Films, distorted the survivors' stories, but by using them as illustrative of a perpetrator-led master narrative, they are denying the survivors and the stories they tell agency whilst directly, and unquestioningly, benefitting from their privileged status. Only the survivors can really know what it was like to experience the Holocaust, and their descriptions are used to support the historical narrative of the exhibition rather than to shape the historical narrative. For this, the museum still relies on historiography, existing popular representations, and the documentary evidence of the perpetrators. While survivors are prominent, they are still largely regarded as illustrative rather than informative. Their testimonies support the material evidence in the museum rather than challenge or problematise it.

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<sup>294</sup> Suzanne Bardgett in conversation with author, August 27 2015.

<sup>295</sup> Isabel Wollaston, *A War Against Memory? The Future of Holocaust Remembrance* (London: SPCK, 1996), 50.

While this approach is entirely understandable within the IWMHE as Britain's first major permanent national exhibition focused on the Holocaust - the curatorial team were eager to present an accepted history of the Holocaust - it does present the need for a reassessment of how survivors are used within a museum context. When the exhibition first opened, Tony Kushner published an article on the use of oral testimonies within a museum context but little further engagement with the topic followed. While it has been accepted that survivors play a prominent role in museums, exhibitions, documentaries, and memorial events and occasions (thus playing a major role in shaping public memory of the Holocaust), there is little consideration as to how they are used and how this affects public perceptions both of Holocaust survivors, of survivors of genocide more broadly, and of the Holocaust.

#### Constructing memory of the Holocaust through testimony

Independent film production company October Films, made up of documentary filmmaker Annie Dodds and historian and documentary filmmaker James Barker, were tasked with providing all of the films for the IWMHE. From the project's inception, Bardgett was convinced that film 'would be essential - for its ability to convey the power of propaganda, to capture so vividly the confrontation between perpetrator and persecuted, and to show the very fabric of everyday life.'<sup>296</sup> Though it was not immediately clear what format or position the visual element would take. During the planning stages for the Holocaust exhibition, despite the now prominent position of the Holocaust survivor in Holocaust memory and culture more generally, Bardgett described some trepidation at utilising survivor testimony within the final displays. Testimony, Bardgett claims, was used successfully within documentaries however she was not convinced of its usefulness within the context of a museum exhibition. There was concern over whether visitors would believe survival was the norm for victims of the Holocaust, or that images of elderly survivors would jar with visitors as they listened to childhood memories. Bardgett wanted to stress survival was not the experience of most Holocaust victims and that stories spoken by the survivors told of exceptional or extraordinary circumstances. Despite Bardgett's hesitancy, October Films convinced the IWMHE project office that testimony on film would provide a vital element to the exhibition and enrich the Holocaust narrative provided.<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> Suzanne Bardgett, "Film and the Making of the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition," in *Holocaust and the Moving Image: Representations in film and television since 1933*, ed. Toby Haggith and Joanna Newman (London: Wallflower Press, 2005) 20.

<sup>297</sup> Suzanne Bardgett, in conversation with author, August 27, 2015

The selection of survivors chosen for inclusion within Britain's first national display was based on their merits as speakers and presenters rather than on the stories they had to tell. Alison Murchie, a member of HEPO, was tasked with sourcing suitable candidates from the museum's sound archive. Bardgett believed in members of the Project Office 'working to their strengths', and coming from a family of actors, it was agreed that Murchie would be best suited to identifying survivors that would connect with visitors to the exhibition.<sup>298</sup> The requirements of the survivors were that they needed to speak English, their voices clear and well-paced. This was so that visitors to the museum would not have to follow lengthy subtitling but could hear and understand the voices of the survivors even surrounded by distractions. Limiting the list of available testimonies even further, it was suggested that, for practical reasons, the survivors should by and large live locally to the museum. This would be beneficial to the survivors and October Films when it came to recording the final video testimony footage. It can therefore be argued that the selection criteria for survivors used within the exhibition were severely limiting. The experiences conveyed, and thus preserved by the museum, would be skewed towards the experiences of those survivors choosing Britain as their post-war home, and even more specifically, those living in the capital city. While a cross-section of survivors from varying backgrounds, gender, and religion were sought, all shared the commonality of living and working in London and this would inevitably shape the perceptions and perspectives of their own life narratives.

Of the 16 survivors selected from the IWM sound archive, all appear in the final Holocaust exhibition display. The interviews were structured and undertaken by Annie Dodds and James Barker, who were also responsible for drafting the questions to be asked. Dodds and Barker had been present at each design meeting for the exhibition, so they were aware of how it was to be brought together. While this made sense in terms of design, Dodds and Barker were able to adapt their questioning to gain comments and feedback on elements of each story that would pull sections of the exhibition together, in terms of maintaining the integrity of the life stories, this would offer a way of structuring the personal narratives to reflect the master narrative prescribed by the exhibition. The survivors' experiences would be filtered before the editing process, shaped to suit the institution's own agenda.

Barker shaped the narrative of the interviews to suit the 29 chapters drafted for the Holocaust story within the IWMHE. Testimonies were to make up a large part of the final exhibition, totalling over an hour and a half of sound recordings for visitors to watch and

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<sup>298</sup> Suzanne Bardgett, in conversation with author, August 27, 2015

listen to. With an expected visit to the exhibition suggested to take approximately two hours, visitors are not expected to watch and listen to all of the recordings; they are designed for the visitor to drop in and out. Several survivors discuss their experiences at regular intervals, and observation of visitor actions suggests visitors, on average, watch or listen to approximately half of a recording. It appears visitors are more likely to watch an entire video recording than listen to the entirety of an audio only outlet. While undertaking research on the use of testimonies within the exhibition I took notes on each recording and, at each of several visits, the sound recordings within the section 'Inside the Camps' were rarely an aspect of focus. The recordings here act as a background to the objects and images displayed. They are not displayed on a monitor but transmitted through overhead sound cones. It is possible to hear the stories without standing directly below the cones, however the voices (and, by extension, the experiences) merge into one as visitors continue their visit from the concentration camp system to resistance and rescue.

The 'inside the camp' testimony recordings make up the largest proportion of testimony within the whole exhibition. There are two sound recordings in this section totalling almost half an hour of material. Visitors are unlikely to listen to all or both of the sound recordings in this section, largely because there is an absence of seating here and because the sound recordings are situated in the middle of the room where visitors have little visual stimulation. The route naturally directs visitors through this darkened room towards the next room, which offers traditional display strategies of objects in glass cases alongside interactive multimedia desks allowing visitors to probe deeper into the history of the Holocaust.

Unlike on the video monitors, survivors on the audio recordings are not named (though they are the same survivors as appear on the video recordings. The astute visitor may recognise particular voices). The recordings play on a loop, so visitors will enter the narrative at different points. The testimony is grouped together thematically, with survivors describing their own personal experiences, though these are contextualised alongside the experiences of others. There are no specific details given, of places for example, but a sense of place is created and reaffirmed through the multiple descriptions of the shower room on arrival. A male survivor informs visitors 'we were taken to a large washroom to undress. There were all these men without clothes huddled together'. Followed by a female voice describing being 'pushed into a shower room', while another was 'stripped of everything [...] hair shaved off.' One of the interviewees states 'What stays

in my mind is I was 16, it was that feeling, the feeling of humiliation. My hair was shaven, our pubic hair was shaven, and there were these young Germans who were watching it and making crude remarks about our bodies and laughing.' From here the testimony describes the process on entering the camp, survival within the camp, roll call, hunger, work, conditions within the camp - the lice, the inability to clean, friends and family in the camps, selection and death, experiments, murder, and finally hope. These are the common themes from which a sentence or paragraph of the survivors' testimonies would be extracted to provide the human impact of treatment and conditions within the Nazi concentration camp system. There is no attempt to distinguish between camps or camp experiences at this point. The themes are drawn out of the individual interviews to offer a human voice to the master narrative of the exhibition. During this process the words of the survivors are decontextualised and given new emphasis and meaning in support of the exhibition's own historical understanding and interpretation. The testimonies were gathered with a purpose that reaches beyond retelling the survivors' personal narratives. Testimonies were collected to reaffirm a particular vision of the past, and this affects what stories are told. As Zoe Waxman has convincingly argued,

The accepted concept of the Holocaust and the role of collective memory place two demands on the survivor. First, they seek to homogenize survivors' experiences, and secondly, they assume that, in adopting the role of the witness, survivors will adopt a universal identity. But, in negotiating the hegemony of accepted Holocaust narratives, some survivors' experiences are either pushed towards the margins or neglected altogether. Survivors not only need to find an identity that enables them to cope with their experiences and find meaning in their lives, they also have to worry about how the representation of their experiences relates to the modus operandi of collective memory, the concept of the Holocaust, and the accepted role of the witness.<sup>299</sup>

The experiences of the Holocaust survivors used within the IWMHE are shaped to conform to an accepted version of the Holocaust, a version that is given an authority through the IWMHE. Annette Wieviorka has credited the Eichmann trial for 'legitimizing testimony as a form of "truth telling" about the past'.<sup>300</sup> So here we may understand testimonies within the context of the museum as a form of legitimating the narrative presented.

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<sup>299</sup> Zoe V. Waxman, *Writing the Holocaust: Identity, Testimony, Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 158-159.

<sup>300</sup> Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*, 58.

### Testimony and the IWMHE Narrative

Holocaust testimonies presented within a museum context necessarily become both more and less than they originally were. More as they offer greater narrative potential when edited in a particular way, and less as, due to the limitations of presenting the testimony in truncated form, they do not allow the narrative potential of the Holocaust survivor to be realised. With no single testimony presented from beginning to end, the stories are amalgamated to offer visitors a sense of the Holocaust past as it was experienced by the survivors as a collective. The testimonies are framed in a very specific way, sections of speech are taken from various parts of the whole to suit the exhibition's narrative flow. The survivors' memories have to fit within the landscape of the exhibition, and they have to hold meaning for the visiting public; the memories need to be relevant to a contemporary audience. In the representation of the Holocaust within the IWMHE, a certain image of the survivors is projected. This image, it may be argued, denies the survivors individuality, despite an intention to personalise the Holocaust through testimony and highlight how the broad Nazi policies affected individual victims. Survivors of the Holocaust become products of the museum, edited or packaged for public consumption. The way they are framed within the audio-visual displays (and exhibition literature), drastically affects and alters their personal narratives as they become dependent on others' testimony for coherence. The exhibition further edits and irons out any complexity, ultimately containing the testimony beyond the survivors' (conscious or unconscious) intentions. The narration of trauma in this way, Oren Baruch Stier has argued, has been domesticated and made into a commodity.<sup>301</sup> The testimonies are manipulated to offer a number of potential narratives that were not a part of any survivor's original stories. The survivor testimonies used within the IWMHE are stitched together to present at least nine explicit narratives, framed in a particular way so that the testimony would be relevant to the exhibition's overarching historical narrative of the Holocaust. The survivors offer a unifying voice on the experiences of persecution throughout this period. Through the survivors' own words, the narrative of the exhibition is realised.

The nine main narratives covered by the IWMHE through the words of the survivors (which within them contain further narratives) are life before the Nazis, Jews and other victims as outcasts, terror strikes Poland, ghettoisation, deportation, Auschwitz, inside the camps, discovery of the camps by Allied forces, and survivor reflections on their past experiences

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<sup>301</sup> Stier, *Committed to Memory*, 106.



and lessons for the future. The first eight narrative strands follow a chronological pattern in terms of the exhibition's narrative, however there is an element of jumping around in the timeline of the survivor testimonies. The last narrative strand asks the survivor to reflect on their experiences and this 'staged narrative' complicates the original testimonial storyline. According to Stier, 'the survivors are not only recalling their earlier lives but supplementing them with activity in the contemporary time frame.'<sup>302</sup> Stier argues that attention to the various frames of reference reveals the highly mediated nature of Holocaust memory. The frame of testimony alters its original meaning, offering an alternative narrative orientation to that intended by the survivor witness.<sup>303</sup> The testimonies as they are employed by the IWMHE present broad representative narratives that are reflective of the institution's own agenda. The interviews are shaped into relevant texts, reflecting what is important to Holocaust memory at this particular time and in this particular place.

The audio-visual testimonies were designed to give a voice, albeit highly mediated, to individual Holocaust survivors. As in the USHMM, the IWMHE chose to play testimony films and audio on a continuous loop. This satisfies the practicality of allowing visitors to enter and leave the narratives at any point - as the visitor makes their journey through the exhibition they will inevitably encounter the testimony at differing points - and also theoretically blurs the parameters of the narrative sequence by refusing to indicate a clear sense of beginning, middle, and end. Access to the material is arguably more open in this sense as the material could, and would, be experienced differently by individual museum visitors. As a result, museum visitors encounter testimony in varying ways and to varying degrees. Some choose to sit (or stand) through an entire film or recording, while others choose to dip in and out, perhaps listening to only one voice, or a fragment of one survivor's already truncated testimony. However, while visitors are able to choose how much, if any, testimony to encounter within the exhibition, the testimonies are organised thematically, thus restricting the visitors' engagement with any one survivor-witness. Rather than engage with the individual survivor-witness, visitors to the exhibition are encouraged to think about the themes depicted within the testimonies. This is illustrated through the inability of the visitor to follow any one survivor-witness story throughout the displays. At each point testimony features within the exhibition it does so as an illustration of a particular moment in the Holocaust story, to illustrate the impact of a particular action, legislation, or movement on individual lives.

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<sup>302</sup> Stier, *Committed to Memory*, 106.

<sup>303</sup> Stier, *Committed to Memory*, 107.

That October Films opted to film the survivors in a bland and neutral setting goes some way to suggesting a need to merge the survivor experiences into one coherent Holocaust experience. At the same time they need to maintain a certain level of nuance to support the idea that victims came from many different backgrounds and had many different pre-war, war, and post-war experiences. There is a tension here between a need to generalise over the survivor-witness experience and ensuring they are depicted as a disparate and varied group of individuals. With each survivor-witness appearing on film within the same non-descript surroundings, the viewer has nothing but the survivor to focus on. This allows for an easy transition between survivor on the films, as visitors are not asked to adapt to varied and changing backgrounds. This also makes the films more difficult to date, which is important when planning a permanent exhibition on any historical subject. It is difficult to see, for example, that the testimony films were recorded almost twenty years ago. The setting was, however, intended to put the survivor at ease so that they may offer a candid retelling of their personal narratives. The construction of the testimony interviews was such that the audience appears to receive pure, unmediated truths from the mouths of survivors - those who were there, those who truly *know*. The films appear to offer direct access to an experience of the past in a way that material remains and Nazi documentation are unable to provide. Giving testimony in an exhibitionary context is a mode of performance for the survivor. The story told has been rehearsed, and the delivery is confident and authoritative. There is a tension between the voice of the survivor and the commanding voice of the exhibition. The IWMHE have utilised testimony in such a way as to highlight certain key aspects of history within individual life stories. As a result, certain themes are drawn from the video texts and publicly displayed at the expense of others to pinpoint key elements in Holocaust memory in Britain.

An important aim of the survivor testimony was for the main points made by the survivor to be comprehended by the audience when taken out of the context of the interview and placed within the context of the exhibition. Each survivor would need to have identifiable experiences that could stand away from the rest of their stories, otherwise the testimonies would not work in a museum environment. As each testimony was going to be used in truncated form, the answers survivors gave to each of the interviewers questions needed to be focused and punchy. In the USHMM's search for usable testimonies they applied the notion of a 'peanut butter theory.' In an internal memo of the Memorial Museum Learning Centre this theory is explained,

What are the qualities that constitute good oral history from an interactive point of view? They are the same qualities that make good peanut butter. It should be thick, chunky, and easy to spread. Smooth peanut butter is amorphous stuff - what you need are chunks. In video, these are small identifiable segments that have clean beginnings and endings and which can serve some purpose out of context ... is the oral history thick? Is it chunky? Is it easy to spread? Three "yes" responses lend a very powerful endorsement to conversion [from video testimony to interactive delivery].<sup>304</sup>

Noah Shenker identifies how this approach potentially reduces survivors to 'exemplars of suffering mobilized in the service of a particular institutional narrative,'<sup>305</sup> however balances this with the greater access enabled the material through its delivery in the museum's learning centre interactive display. This is an argument of quantity over quality in that more people have access to the material, however the material they have access to is often limited and self-serving on the part of the museum exhibition. The rigid framework provided by the IWMHE means those 'chunks' of information that can quickly and effectively illustrate the narrative are predictable and repetitive and do not allow for individualism on the part of the survivor.

The use of survivor testimonies within the IWMHE can be considered a product of their time. The idea of including witnesses and their testimonies in the public sphere began to gather momentum in the 1980s. As Margaret Taft highlights, '[h]istorical interest in the construction of Holocaust narratives based on victim testimonies gathered pace in the 1980s'.<sup>306</sup> By the mid 1990s, when plans for the permanent Holocaust exhibition were coming to fruition, to exclude the victims' voices from the Holocaust would jar dramatically with the direction in which Holocaust historiography and its popular manifestations was moving. This leads us to interesting forecasts on how public Holocaust displays may begin changing throughout the twenty first century, and how different they may look after the passing of the last surviving witness.

The IWMHE were keen to follow the format championed by documentary film maker Laurence Rees in his Holocaust documentary *The Nazis: A Warning from History* (1997). Having been released mid-way through the planning phase of the exhibition, its influence

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<sup>304</sup> Steven Koppel, Memorandum to Learning Centre Advisory Committee Regarding "The Peanut Butter Theory": Evaluating the Potential of Existing Video Testimonies for Conversion to Interactive Delivery. 9 February 1989, Cited in Noah Shenker, "Embodied Memory: The Institutional Mediation of Survivor Testimony in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum," in *Documentary Testimonies: Global Archives of Suffering*, ed. Bhaskar Sarkar and Janet Walker (London: Routledge, 2010), 48.

<sup>305</sup> Shenker, "Embodied Memory," 49.

<sup>306</sup> Margaret Taft, *From Victim to Survivor: The Emergence and Development of the Holocaust Witness, 1941-1949* (Middlesex: Vallentine Mitchell, 2013), 3.

can largely be attributed to its timing and the audience it intended to address (a similar target audience to that of the proposed Holocaust exhibition within the IWM). It was a documentary aimed at a mass audience, an audience with relatively little background knowledge on the Holocaust. As witnesses were interviewed throughout the documentary, staff of HEPO began to consider the value of such testimony within an exhibitionary context, particularly in a video documentary format. This offered a tried and tested method of displaying Holocaust material in a clear and accessible way. Importantly HEPO were convinced that this approach would not only be accepted by the visiting public, but expected.

While popular cultural artefacts such as Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993) and the resulting USC Shoah Foundation archive of testimonies have opened up the arena for survivors to begin publicly speaking about their experiences, they also unavoidably shape the narratives that determine exactly what survivors should, or feel they can, talk about.<sup>307</sup> This has an impact not only on the narratives that remain publicly circulated, but also on the narratives that are to be collected and preserved for future memory and memorial practices.

Discussing the work of Annette Wiewiorka, Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer suggest the purpose of the Holocaust witness is no longer to transmit the history of the Holocaust - historians do not trust the veracity of the aged memory. Witnesses, Wiewiorka contends, possess an inadequate knowledge of the past but exist primarily to keep the witness in the public eye, 'Testimony is to be a means of transmission to future generations.'<sup>308</sup> Survivors are not experts on the Holocaust, they are experts in their own life-stories only and this is an aspect of testimony recall that is often overlooked in Britain. As survivors are expected to provide a narrative history of the Holocaust within their testimonies - particularly those survivors asked to speak to school children - they are expected to frame their own experiences within a broader comprehension of what the Holocaust was and how it is understood in Britain today. As a result, their individual stories lose agency and the multiple survivor accounts begin to merge into one. Isabel Wollaston has argued the

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<sup>307</sup> The first pilot interview with a Holocaust survivor was filmed for the USC Shoah Foundation in April 1994, A year after filming was completed for *Schindler's List* (1993). The collection of testimonies built through this archive resulted directly from *Schindler's List* director, Steven Spielberg's ambition to collect and preserve the full life stories of Holocaust survivors. According the Foundation's website, '[t]he interview structure came from Spielberg's desire to tell a complete life story; survivors would be asked to talk about their background before the war began, describe their experiences during the war, and relate how their lives had unfolded in its aftermath.' "About," USC Shoah Foundations, accessed October 22, 2015, <http://fi.usc.edu/about>.

<sup>308</sup> Annette Wiewiorka cited in, Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer, "The Witness in the Archive: Holocaust studies/memory studies," *Memory Studies* (2009): 155.

representation of victims and survivors within the IWMHE is less detailed than that of the perpetrators, survivors, she claims, 'cease to be identified on video, their stories blend into each other so that we encounter what is, in effect, a composite survivor.'<sup>309</sup> Personalising the victims of the Holocaust, both living and deceased, can be seen as a change in approach for Holocaust museums as they seek to give a face, a voice, and, where possible, a name to the millions of Holocaust victims depicted within museums globally.

While Wollaston's argument of the 'composite survivor' is very valid when looking at the IWMHE, the idea that survivors are not identified within the exhibition is more complex. Individual survivors are in fact identified in each of the testimony videos. Their names are not repeated throughout the entire looped film, however visitors are given an opportunity to learn who they are. It is not possible to follow one witness's testimony throughout the exhibition as the testimony films are not designed in this way. Survivors appear sporadically on film when a particular aspect of their story suits the narrative presented through the exhibition.

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<sup>309</sup> Isabel Wollaston, "Negotiating the Marketplace: The Role(s) of Holocaust Museums Today," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 4, no. 1 (2005): 69.

**Holocaust Education in the Museum: 'Promoting mutual understanding in a multicultural society'<sup>310</sup>**

This chapter assesses the role of the IWMHE in providing resources for Holocaust education nationally within Britain. Due to practical restraints, many of the visiting school groups are based in and around London, which limits the impact of the exhibition. Learning resources, however, are produced for the use of schools throughout the country and reflect the perspective and approaches adopted by the IWMHE. The following discussion explores the use of the Holocaust in education in Britain (with a focus on the National Curriculum for England and Wales) and the relationship between the museum and educational demands and expectations. With the recent inclusion of the Holocaust on the National Curriculum, this was a key focus for the IWM during the design phase of the permanent Holocaust exhibition. It may then be concluded the educational provisions of the museum had a significant impact on the final displays. As such, this is a vital element to understanding the representation of the Holocaust in Britain; its aims, uses, intentions and purpose.

**Debates in education and the educational provision for the Imperial War Museum Holocaust exhibition**

'The contribution that a knowledge of the Holocaust can make to citizenship education is self-evident'<sup>311</sup>. This chapter presents a challenge to this statement by Geoffrey Short and Carole Ann Reed, through a detailed analysis of the educational provision of the Imperial War Museum Holocaust exhibition. The contribution, it may be argued, is far from self-evident as the Holocaust is employed as a counter-example of a democratic society with little questioning of its educational value. Coming to terms with the Holocaust, Short and Reed argue, 'allows students to appreciate racism's destructive potential and its inherent capacity to target *any* ethnic group, if sufficiently powerless' (emphasis in original). Short and Reed continue to argue that study of the Holocaust 'permits an awareness that the roots of racism are often historically embedded and that both socio-economic and

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<sup>310</sup> "T.E.A.C.H.: A Report from the Historical Association on the Challenges and Opportunities for Teaching Emotive and Controversial History, 3-19," *The Historical Association*, (Department for Education and Skills, 2007), 11, accessed January 2016, <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/http://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/RW100.pdf>

<sup>311</sup> Geoffrey Short and Carole Ann Reed, *Issues in Holocaust Education* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 73.

psychological factors can play a catalytic role in igniting underlying tensions.<sup>312</sup> This speaks of both a uniqueness and universalising of the Holocaust in education that is reflected within the IWMHE approach. This approach is based on an assumption that learning about the past can prevent repetition in the present and future; a deeply problematic position. This chapter considers the role of the IWMHE in delivering Holocaust lessons and explores the relationship between a national museum display and the National Curriculum for history and citizenship in England and Wales.

As Eilean Hooper-Greenhill has identified, 'museums have reshaped themselves for contemporary times, their educational purposes have become prioritised and their educational provision has increased.' Since 1997, Hooper-Greenhill highlights, this has been driven forward in England by government policies that have 'insisted that education in museums should be centrally positioned.'<sup>313</sup> This chapter will consider the educational programming and outreach materials produced in conjunction with the IWMHE; it will explore the ways the nation and citizenship are considered and the role this plays in the construction of identities for school children. The materials produced by the IWMHE are designed to supplement the National Curriculum and contribute to Holocaust learning through interaction with physical displays. This chapter will consider Holocaust education in England and Wales, and the role of museum-based learning in reinforcing the aims and intentions of Holocaust learning in the classroom.

The educational role the newly proposed IWMHE would play was never questioned, while plans were underway for the inclusion of the Holocaust within the museum's permanent galleries they prioritised recruitment for several key positions designed to support the educational function of the exhibition.<sup>314</sup> Educational outreach was considered an essential aspect of the exhibition's purpose, and this was not limited to school groups; the IWMHE intended to create links with the local community too. It was believed that close links with the local communities of Southwark and Lambeth 'would be a good development both for the museum in PR terms and for what such a relationship could do for the area.'<sup>315</sup> This reflects the direction of museums towards engagement in community activities and

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<sup>312</sup> Short and Reed, *Issues in Holocaust Education*, 73.

<sup>313</sup> Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, *Museums and Education: Purpose, Pedagogy, Performance* (London: Routledge, 2007), 2.

<sup>314</sup> Recruitment for the Holocaust Exhibition education department, Education Provision for Holocaust Exhibition file, Holocaust Exhibition Archive, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>315</sup> Memorandum from AB [Anna Ballin] to Director-General on Holocaust education, August 7, 1997, Education Provision for Holocaust Exhibition file, Holocaust Exhibition Archive, Imperial War Museum, London.

inclusivity, 'community' and 'inclusive community' have become 'buzzwords in the arts and museum sectors.'<sup>316</sup> The IWMHE educational team intended to create links with youth groups, to explore issues of racism and intolerance in British society, with programmes extending to the elderly and groups with specific learning needs.<sup>317</sup> While the IWM acknowledged it should be engaging with communities and groups outside of the museum, head of Holocaust education at the IWM, Anita Ballin, stated the opening of the Holocaust exhibition would provide 'a perfect opportunity to get such a project off the ground.'<sup>318</sup> It was hoped the Holocaust exhibition could help raise the educational profile of the museum as a whole; with generous funding for the project, emphasis could be placed (and thus justification) on the learning outcomes of the exhibition. With the Holocaust a mandatory topic for study on the National Curriculum for key stages three and four, the Holocaust exhibition, it was believed, could provide learning support and resources for secondary school children. The Holocaust exhibition was expected to bring new opportunities for education within the IWM. 'Very intensive use' was expected to be made of the facility by visiting schools and the Holocaust exhibition was being developed with the 'needs of school children firmly in mind'.<sup>319</sup>

Museums and education are both intimately linked in the construction of identities. The relationship between museums and the formation of identities, specifically national identity, has been discussed in an earlier chapter, here attention is drawn to the relationship between education and identity. Philosopher Edgar Morin claims the 'teaching of history is indispensable for the establishment of national identity.'<sup>320</sup> Roy Lowe argues that schooling and school systems, as well as other modes of informal learning, 'have proved repeatedly to be key devices for the development and transmission of a sense of nationhood.'<sup>321</sup> If to exist as 'imagined communities'<sup>322</sup> nations must have a 'measure of common understandings and aspiration, sentiments and ideas, that bind the population

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<sup>316</sup> Elizabeth Crooke, "Museums and Community," in *A Companion to Museum Studies*, ed. Sharon Macdonald, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2011), 170.

<sup>317</sup> Memorandum from AB to Director-General on Holocaust education, August 7, 1997.

<sup>318</sup> Memorandum from AB to Director-General on Holocaust education, August 7, 1997.

<sup>319</sup> Learning about the Holocaust: An educational programme for the new millennium, Suzanne Bardgett, December 19, 1996, Educational Provision for Holocaust Education file, Holocaust Exhibition Archive, Imperial War Museum, London.

<sup>320</sup> Edgar Morin cited in, Mario Carretero, Maria Rodríguez-Moneo and Mikel Asensio, "History, Education and the Construction of National Identity," in *History Education and the Construction of National Identity*, ed. Mario Carretero, Maria Rodríguez-Moneo and Mikel Asensio (North Carolina: Information Age, 2012), 2.

<sup>321</sup> Roy Lowe, "Education and National Identity," *History of Education* 28, no.3 (1999): 231.

<sup>322</sup> See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983).



together in their homeland.' This is achieved in part, Anthony Smith argues, through the education system.<sup>323</sup> As Edward Vickers highlights, the controversy over the introduction of the National Curriculum for History demonstrated 'the way that the selection and presentation of historical knowledge to students was intimately bound up with perceptions of national identity [and] with conceptions of the role of education in citizenship formation'.<sup>324</sup> Mario Carretero, Maria Rodríguez-Moneo and Mikel Asensio claim, however, the

historical content that is closely linked to the construction of a national identity tends to positively value the predominant social group, to explain the features of the national identity in essentialist rather than historical terms, to reject sources that conflict with a socially acceptable account of events, to positively assess political developments in the country, to uncritically employ certain emblematic historical figures (often based on a "heroes and villains" dichotomy), and to create continuity and permanent links between the facts and characters of the past and the present circumstances of the national group.<sup>325</sup>

In discussions of what of the past should be taught, relevant to the National Curriculum in schools and the educational programming of museums, the values and identity of a community are at stake.<sup>326</sup> Nicholas Kilnoch stresses it should not be surprising that the Nazi genocide has assumed such importance in British education, 'it is an apparently "safe" topic. Few people in Britain, beyond a tiny and insignificant neo-Nazi fringe, are in any doubt that the Shoah took place.' The lessons, Kilnoch argues, 'seem both obvious and universal'.<sup>327</sup> Peter Novick, however, raises questions over the universalising of the Holocaust and its use as a bearer of lessons. In large part, Novick's position is based on the 'Holocaust's extremity, which on the one hand makes its practical lessons of little applicability to everyday life; on the other hand makes anything to which it is compared look "not so bad."' But there is another dimension to Novick's argument,

Along with most historians, I'm skeptical about the so-called lessons of history. I'm especially skeptical about the sort of pithy lessons that fit on a bumper sticker. If there is, to use a pretentious word, any wisdom to be acquired from contemplating an historical event, I would think it would derive from confronting it in all its complexity and its contradictions; the ways in which it resembles other events to

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<sup>323</sup> Anthony Smith, *National Identity* (Nevada, Nevada University Press, 1991), 11.

<sup>324</sup> Edward Vickers, "Introduction: History, Nationalism, and the Politics of Memory," in *History Education and National Identity in East Asia*, ed. Edward Vickers (Abingdon, Routledge, 2005), 1.

<sup>325</sup> Carretero, Rodríguez-Moneo and Asensio, "History, Education and the Construction of National Identity," 2.

<sup>326</sup> Carretero, Rodríguez-Moneo and Asensio, "History, Education and the Construction of National Identity," 3.

<sup>327</sup> Nicholas Kilnoch, "Parallel Catastrophes? Uniqueness, Redemption and the Shoah," *History Teaching* 104, (2001): 9.

which it might be compared as well as the ways it differs from them. It is not - least of all when it comes to the Holocaust - a matter of approaching the past in a neutral or value-free fashion, or of abstaining from moral judgement. And it's not a matter of taking a disengaged academic stance.[...] If there *are* lessons to be extracted from encountering the past, that encounter has to be with the past in all its messiness; they're not likely to come from an encounter with a past that's been shaped and shaded so that inspiring lessons will emerge.<sup>328</sup>

While there is a general consensus the Holocaust should be taught in schools throughout England (illustrated by its inclusion on the National Curriculum), less thought is given to why and how Holocaust learning should be delivered. Novick highlights the hope educators have of 'extracting from the Holocaust something that is, if not redemptive, at least useful.'<sup>329</sup> While he doubts this can be done, this is demonstrably a central aim for Holocaust education in Britain.

According to Andy Pearce,

The incorporation of the Holocaust into the first National Curriculum for history was landmark. Like any boundary marker, it had symbolic value and practical function. It signified governmental belief in the Holocaust's significance and relevance to Britain, and a commitment to conveying this to future generations.<sup>330</sup>

That said, Pearce argues there is no straightforward answer as to why the Holocaust was included on the National Curriculum. 'It was included because it could be; because there were degrees of interest in the subject among teachers and students; and because there was sufficient political will and drive to force the agenda.'<sup>331</sup> Confusion over why the Holocaust was included and what was to be taught left teachers frustrated and hostile. Supporting literature and resources, Pearce argues, were deemed inaccessible to students. Neither state, nor schoolteacher 'appeared to know what the Holocaust was to be taught as, how it would be resourced, or ultimately why it was now deemed an essential part of children's education.'<sup>332</sup>

Speaking in the early-1990s, Tony Kushner claims the Holocaust became an important aspect of educational initiatives out of a 'growing commitment to multi-cultural and anti-racist strategies at a national and, particularly, local government level.'<sup>333</sup> Arguably the Holocaust found its way into the school system as a means of addressing contemporary

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<sup>328</sup> Peter Novick, *The Holocaust and Collective Memory* (London: Bloomsbury, 1999), 261.

<sup>329</sup> Novick, *The Holocaust and Collective Memory*, 261.

<sup>330</sup> Pearce, *Holocaust Consciousness in Contemporary Britain*, 61.

<sup>331</sup> Pearce, *Holocaust Consciousness in Contemporary Britain*, 63.

<sup>332</sup> Pearce, *Holocaust Consciousness in Contemporary Britain*, 62-63

<sup>333</sup> Kushner, *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination*, 261.

racism, particularly in inner London schools. The Inner London Education Authority were, Kushner argues, at the forefront of anti-racist work, disseminating material such as 'Auschwitz: Yesterday's Racism.' This, however, remained highly controversial and, due to political opposition, the resource packs were never circulated. Despite the opposition, this marked a significant advancement in raising awareness and public understanding of the Holocaust. This provided evidence of a significant interest in the Holocaust among a younger generation of non-Jewish educationalists.<sup>334</sup> A consequence of this, however, was a marked shift in thinking about the Holocaust in universal terms as opposed to the specificity of the Jewish experience. The approach taken from the beginning has shaped understanding of the Holocaust in Britain and, ultimately, how the Holocaust would be presented and understood through the IWM's permanent Holocaust exhibition. Kushner discusses the initial steps taken to ensure teaching on the Holocaust would become an integral part of the British education system, however this also reflects compromises that have burdened Holocaust education ever since:

There was [...] great dismay in the Jewish community when the first proposals relating to the National History Curriculum dealt only with the British experience in the 1930s. The Nazi regime generally and the Holocaust in particular were automatically ruled out. In what was a remarkable display of ethnic lobbying, the Jewish community, with the support of sympathetic non-Jewish MPs, campaigned through the Yad Vashem committee, the related Holocaust Education Trust and an all-party group of parliamentarians for the subject to be reconsidered in the curriculum. The lobbyists argued that 'To ignore the phenomenon of how one of the world's most civilised nations could have condoned a State policy of mass murder and genocide is to leave unanswered one of the central questions of modern civilisation'. Following a by then well-established pattern, they also argued for the relevance of the subject with regard to questions of modern racism. They also patriotically linked the Holocaust to the British war effort in fighting the evils of Nazism. This campaign was highly effective and in the Final Report of the History Working Party on the National Curriculum, the international aspects of World War II were inserted, including the Holocaust.<sup>335</sup>

Within the English education system the Holocaust now became an integral part of British history through its links to the Second World War. However this somewhat shaky foundation could not provide clarity over how, exactly, history teaching could incorporate Holocaust narratives in an accessible way. If justification for its inclusion in mainstream education was built upon fighting Nazi 'evils' and links with modern racism, then a framework for history was less than clear. Such an approach lends itself to moral rather than historical 'lessons.'

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<sup>334</sup> Kushner, *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination*, 262.

<sup>335</sup> Kushner, *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination*, 262-263.

1995 has been branded the year of the Holocaust in Britain with the inclusion of Holocaust narratives in the 50th anniversary commemorations of the Second World War. With a revised curriculum and renewed public interest, Pearce argues the Holocaust was 'elevated to the status of a "main event"'. It had been uncoupled from the war [within educational programming, not within the popular imagination] to now stand alone as a discrete occurrence alongside the atomic bombs.' Teachers, however,

were left under no illusion that the Holocaust was essential knowledge for their students, but they were none the wiser as to just why the Government deemed this to be so. As much as it could be countered that teachers were freed up 'to teach', the problem was many felt uncomfortable dealing with the subject-specific challenges of the Holocaust and/or ill-prepared to deliver effective teaching.<sup>336</sup>

In the planning stages of the IWMHE, head of Holocaust education for the IWM, Anita Ballin met with teachers and educationalists to discuss how the new Holocaust exhibition could support learning. Ballin noted,

Meetings with other individuals closely involved with Holocaust education [...] confirm that there is a great need for more and better Holocaust teaching. There was a feeling that we should become *the* centre for Holocaust education with a high level of expertise, since we were outside the specifically Jewish world and could, therefore, approach the topic with the necessary historical objectivity and without being associated with any particular interest groups. This would take the subject far beyond the bound of the Jewish world.<sup>337</sup>

Having met with representatives of the Anne Frank Trust, Beth Shalom, the Holocaust Educational Trust, the Jewish Museum and the Spiro Institute, Ballin identified a need for museum based work as a priority over outreach materials. As the Anne Frank Trust and Beth Shalom had already created successful travelling exhibitions, this was seen as something the IWM would not want to compete with. Rather, it was considered that a lack of permanent exhibition display dedicated to a narrative history of the Holocaust highlighted a real opportunity for the IWM to create something new to attract a wider audience.

Education was to be at the heart of the new Holocaust exhibition, and so it was necessary for the education team to clarify exactly what the educational principles were. The planning and opening of the IWMHE coincided with a shift in thinking about diversity in the National Curriculum, which had a notable effect on how the Holocaust would be used in the classroom. While there was still disagreement over how the Holocaust could or should

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<sup>336</sup> Pearce, *Holocaust Consciousness in Contemporary Britain*, 68-69.

<sup>337</sup> Anita Ballin, Report on Holocaust Education, October 10, 1996, Education Provision for Holocaust Exhibition file, Holocaust Exhibition Archive, Imperial War Museum, London.

be used, the introduction of a new subject gave the Holocaust a seemingly more comfortable framework within formal learning; one that overtly politicised Holocaust history and memory in Britain. Citizenship education was first considered in the early-1990s and, from its inception, had close links with history teaching. History and citizenship studies were intended to promote shared values and a common sense of identity in Britain.<sup>338</sup> But if there was confusion over what the Holocaust should mean within the British education system, this was matched by an unease at what, exactly, was meant by citizenship education. As Terence McLaughlin highlighted,

it is clear [...] that the formal introduction of citizenship education into schools as a matter of national policy gives rise to '... substantial and critical intellectual questions about the definition, purposes, and intended outcomes of such education' as well as to related questions of a more practical kind concerning its realisation.<sup>339</sup>

Audrey Osler argues that, following the election of a labour government in 1997, 'education for citizenship and democracy was placed centrally on the agenda.'<sup>340</sup> The publication of the Crick report, the final report of the Advisory Group on Citizenship, highlighted recommendations for the strengthening of education for citizenship and the teaching of democracy in schools.<sup>341</sup> As Osler identified, the Crick report 'acknowledged long-standing cultural, political, and religious diversity within British society and stressed the need for tolerance by the majority population'. The report was limited, however, in its presentation of democracy as a completed project rather than 'as an ongoing struggle, where race, gender, and other inequalities persist.'<sup>342</sup> There was an urgent need to discuss diversity within Britain, to acknowledge difference rather than promote assimilation. This marks a significant shift in thinking as focus was directed at understanding multiple national experiences rather than understanding the British nation as one homogenous group.

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<sup>338</sup> Uvanney Maylor, Barbara Read, Heather Mendick, Alistair Ross and Nicola Rollock, "Diversity and Citizenship in the Curriculum: Research Review," *The Institute for Policy Studies in Education, London Metropolitan University*, accessed January 22, 2016, <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eorderingdownload/rr819.pdf>

<sup>339</sup> Terence H. McLaughlin, "The Crick Report and Beyond," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 34, 4 (2000): 542

<sup>340</sup> Audrey Osler, "Teacher Interpretations of Citizenship Education: National Identity, Cosmopolitan Ideas, and Political Realities," *Curriculum Studies* 43, no.1 (2011): 2.

<sup>341</sup> "The Final Report of the Advisory Group on Citizenship, September 22, 1998," *Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, Institute of Education Digital Education Resource Archive*, accessed January 20, 2016, <http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/4385/1/crickreport1998.pdf>

<sup>342</sup> Osler, "Teacher Interpretations of Citizenship Education," 4.

It was within this climate that discussions on the needs of Holocaust education were taking place within the IWM. The emphasis on promoting difference and democratic values had a profound effect on the approach taken by the museum as the education team began to consider the relevance of the Holocaust to both local and national audiences; particularly school-age audiences. What the Holocaust could teach visitors to the museum was based on a number of questionable assumptions. The Holocaust, it was suggested by Anita Ballin, could provide,

important lessons for a new generation about the fragility of democracy and civilisation when powerful forces come to the fore and brutality is legitimated; on the ethical front it raises important issues about how going along with the majority, about the consequences of not standing up for people's rights and thus the role of the bystander in any society; it also provides a powerful lesson in the strengths in human beings, their capacity to resist and to survive in seemingly unbearable situations; it makes us confront the evil that is in us all and recognises how evil on a massive scale can happen in an educated society.

From this it will be clear that Holocaust education must go beyond a factual study and must embrace the moral implications. Nevertheless, serious study of the facts (not just what happened but more importantly how and why) must be of prime importance. But here I part company with Washington, where, we were told last week, the 'why' is not attempted from the knowledge of how such a thing happened, when it did and how it did. Some lessons can be learned about preventing future atrocities on this scale. But with horrific events going on in the world around us all the time, it is vital we make connections and relate aspects of prejudice, racism and discrimination that come up in relation to the Holocaust with other aspects of hatred and genocide.<sup>343</sup>

The Holocaust is identified here in universal terms as more than a historical topic. Study of the subject, Ballin identified, 'inevitably involves moral issues about bigotry, prejudice and treating people as second-class citizens.' Ballin explicitly links the Holocaust to contemporary issues and believed it necessary to approach the topic, particularly among school children, 'through familiar experiences like bullying, scape-goating and peer pressure.' Some of the educational principles to be included were:

Both the uniqueness and the universality of the Holocaust; the Yehuda Bauer principles: thou shalt not be a perpetrator, a bystander or a victim; the need to be aware of peer-pressure and the difficulty of standing up to perpetrators and challenging bystanders; The positive aspects of human nature that emerged from the Holocaust, e.g. courage and determination shown by rescuers and survivors; comparisons with other genocides or examples of prejudice so that lessons can be learned.<sup>344</sup>

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<sup>343</sup> Anita Ballin, Report on Holocaust Education, October 10,1996.

<sup>344</sup> Anita Ballin, Report on Holocaust Education, October 10,1996.

Ballin pressed for an exhibition that would raise questions and stir visitors into thinking about current problems in the world. Connections with the present world of museum visitors were to be emphasised to avoid them leaving 'feeling totally helpless.' Ballin went further to stress,

We need to be stirred and to recognise the ongoing problems in our world where, despite UN conventions on human rights, there are still acts of genocide and so we need to be brought back firmly to the present and to be made to feel our actions *can* change things.<sup>345</sup>

The Holocaust exhibition set out with an explicit aim to engage with contemporary acts of genocide, though beyond this statement little further work has been undertaken on how this is can or should be achieved; largely it appears to be empty rhetoric.

The IWMHE proved an instant success among school groups with 25,500 secondary schools visiting in its first year of opening.<sup>346</sup> In communicating the rationale behind the IWMHE, IWM Holocaust educator, Paul Salmons argued the Holocaust exhibition at the IWM was established

to document the history of the Holocaust, not to tell people how to feel about these events, nor to further any campaigning agenda aimed at creating a more liberal society. Sober and understated in tone, the philosophy underpinning the exhibition is that this is a story requiring no embellishment and that visitors are capable of making their own moral judgements.<sup>347</sup>

While this is, on the surface, a commendable approach, it does not consider the role of the museum in helping to construct identities and present a view of the world that is culturally rooted. Salmons later acknowledges how 'many of us teach history with a view to the kind of society we would like to encourage',<sup>348</sup> thus implicitly (and often explicitly) imparting lessons based on the creation of a more liberal society. Through its necessarily selective representation of the Holocaust, the exhibition unavoidably encourages certain ways of seeing and knowing. In its early form on the National Curriculum, the Holocaust was positioned within history teaching under the framework of 'experiences of war'. Pearce argues that as an 'experience of war' it was sandwiched between 'the home front in Britain' and 'the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki'. Otherwise, Pearce continues, 'the words "the Holocaust" sat in total isolation, devoid of context. No

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<sup>345</sup> Anita Ballin, Report on Holocaust Education, October 10,1996.

<sup>346</sup> Paul Salmons, "Moral Dilemmas: History, Teaching and the Holocaust," *Teaching History* 104, (2001): 40.

<sup>347</sup> Salmons, "Moral Dilemmas," 34

<sup>348</sup> Salmons, "Moral Dilemmas," 41

directions, no road-map, no signposts.<sup>349</sup> Using this framework, the IWM seemed an ideal location to host Britain's first permanent national exhibition on the Holocaust as Britain's national museum dedicated to telling the 'stories of people's experiences of modern war from WW1 to conflicts today.'<sup>350</sup> Though as the National Curriculum developed and changed, the role and purpose of the exhibition shifted in its support of Holocaust education. History is increasingly linked with citizenship studies (though both remain distinct subjects), which demands 'knowledge and understanding of key citizenship ideas and concepts, including democracy, government, justice, equality, rights, responsibilities, participation, community, identity and diversity' through citizenship studies.<sup>351</sup>

Bruce Carrington and Geoffrey Short argue that Holocaust education has an important role to play in anti-racist pedagogy. 'As well as providing an ideal context for teaching about anti-Semitism, the Holocaust can contribute to anti-racist goals by helping students to understand that ethnic and cultural prejudice and discrimination can take diverse forms.'<sup>352</sup> It was the official report of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry that led the government to 'acknowledge institutional racism as a feature of British society'. This encouraged a commitment to addressing racism within public services, including education. 'Citizenship education was identified as the main vehicle through which this would be addressed within the curriculum.'<sup>353</sup> As such, citizenship studies provides an important context within which the Holocaust is presented to school children, and to how the Holocaust is presented through the IWMHE in support of this education system. Osler has argued that, from 2007 (as a direct result of debates surrounding the 2005 London bombings), a new strand to the citizenship curriculum was proposed. Entitled 'identity and diversity', this new approach attempted to create stronger links between history and citizenship learning, with schools pinpointed as playing a key role in 'strengthening social cohesion, most notably through the promotion of "British" values that include duties and obligations to a common community through the teaching of citizenship and history.'<sup>354</sup> With heightened debate surrounding multiculturalism, national identity and what it means to be British, the government

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<sup>349</sup> Pearce, *Holocaust Consciousness in Contemporary Britain*, 62.

<sup>350</sup> "IWM London," *Imperial War Museums*, accessed January 16, 2016, <http://www.iwm.org.uk/visits/iwm-london>

<sup>351</sup> "Citizenship Studies: GCSE Subject Content," *Department for Education*, accessed January 20, 2016, [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/438602/GCSE\\_subject\\_content\\_for\\_citizenship\\_studies.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/438602/GCSE_subject_content_for_citizenship_studies.pdf)

<sup>352</sup> Bruce Carrington and Geoffrey Short, "Holocaust Education, Anti-Racism and Citizenship," *Educational Review* 49, no.3 (1997): 271.

<sup>353</sup> Osler, "Teacher Interpretations of Citizenship Education," 5

<sup>354</sup> Osler, "Teacher Interpretations of Citizenship Education," 6



championed promotion of so-called British values to foster a sense of community among all members of British society. While citizenship is only one of the subject areas incorporating the Holocaust into learning, it is particularly significant as a subject that openly connects history and identity. The purpose of citizenship education is to foster understanding of democracy, government and how laws are made and upheld; with an aim of preparing students to take their place in society as responsible citizens.<sup>355</sup> This provides fertile ground for discussions of the Holocaust and its universal resonance as an extreme example of what happens when democratic rights are withdrawn. The lessons to be drawn, however, remain unclear and largely superficial. As the teaching resource pack for the IWMHE states, a lesson on the loss of rights and freedoms

will enable you [the class teacher] to cover a large amount of historical ground and, by directly relating the measures taken by the Nazis to the rights and freedoms that students hold to be important today, it supports a deeper understanding of the effects of this persecution.<sup>356</sup>

While activities are produced, no guidance or explanation for how these learning outcomes can be achieved or measured is provided. The lesson it intends to provide is lacking in depth as the activity is intended to demonstrate 'how rights and freedoms were stripped away from Jews and Gypsies in Germany and that life became increasingly hard for them under the Nazi regime.'<sup>357</sup> Such an approach restates the good/bad dichotomy between British and Nazi political systems rather than encouraging connections between the two. Instead the Nazi system and Nazism is represented as the antithesis of Britain and Britishness, both in the past and present.

A national framework is central to citizenship education, which has an impact on how Holocaust history and memory is shaped through education and the museum display. While there is an identification with global contexts (the European perspective, for example), Osler argues the emphasis of citizenship education remains on the nation:

References to students' identities within the citizenship programme of study are largely related to learning to live together in a nation characterised by diversity. Commonality and social cohesion are stressed, as are respect for and learning about different "ideas, beliefs, cultures and identities and the values we share as

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<sup>355</sup> "National Curriculum in England: Citizenship Programmes of Study for Key Stages 3 and 4." *Department for Education*, accessed January 28, 2016, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-citizenship-programmes-of-study-for-key-stages-3-and-4>

<sup>356</sup> Paul Salmons, *Reflections: The Holocaust Exhibition, a cross-curricular resource pack for teaching about the Holocaust* (London: IWM, 2009), 51.

<sup>357</sup> Salmons, *Reflections*, 52.

citizens in the UK." The history curriculum also aims to encourage "mutual understanding of the historic origins of our ethnic and cultural diversity" and the development of students' identities through an understanding of history at personal, local, national and international levels.<sup>358</sup>

Placed within a national framework, school children develop an understanding of history anchored in ideas of the nation. The focus turns to becoming responsible citizens defined by belonging to the national group. As a result, history, or more specifically historical representations, become a vehicle for an expression of Britishness and a reaffirmation of loosely defined 'British values' in which British values became naturalised and widely accepted within the nation. This forms the foundation of national identity upon which stories of the past are built unquestioned. The focus remains on what it means to be a citizen of Britain rather than a citizen of Europe or the world more broadly, which is limiting and exclusionary. As Osler has argued,

Citizenship education, in England, as elsewhere remains focused on the nation and on citizens' supposed natural affinity to the nation-state. Citizenship as a status, i.e. the responsibilities of citizens rights, and duties, including voting, is addressed at the national level and to a lesser extent the local level. European citizenship as a status is implicit. There is no formal status as global citizen, although we are all holders of human rights. There is coverage of human rights within the official curriculum, but an individual's status as a holder of universal human rights and an exploration of what this might mean in terms of global citizenship remains implicit. Within the official citizenship curriculum for England there is a strong emphasis on citizenship as feeling (student identities, with particular attention to national identity) and on citizenship as practice (active citizenship, engagement in the local community). The new ways in which citizens can engage actively as citizens, across and beyond the boundaries of the nation, as a result of information technologies, are not explored, and so the emphasis on active citizenship or citizenship as practice remains largely confined to the school and local communities.<sup>359</sup>

Such an approach leads to divisions within society rather than an inclusive understanding and empathy with the plight of global citizens. To understand history and citizenship within a strict national framework limits engagement with world history and narratives transcending national boundaries. To be considered global citizens transcends national boundaries and rejects limiting divisions. Borders legitimate an 'us' and 'them' dichotomy in which our actions to help others become a reflection of our own good will (an expression of cultural superiority) rather than a minimum requirement as a fellow human or global citizen.

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<sup>358</sup> Osler, "Teacher Interpretations of Citizenship Education," 6.

<sup>359</sup> Osler, "Teacher Interpretations of Citizenship Education," 7.

As an alternative model, Osler discusses cosmopolitan citizenship as a concept linking the local, national and global:

In emphasising a common humanity and human solidarity, cosmopolitanism does not seek to deny local or regional identifications [...] local identities remain important for cosmopolitans. It is at the local level that we have the opportunity to practice our citizenship on a day-to-day basis. Demonstrating solidarity with others in the global community has limited value, if we are not ready and able to stand up for justice and defend the rights of others in our own locality.<sup>360</sup>

Osler argues that citizenship education has traditionally focused on the nation 'and has often assumed that learner-citizens will have a natural affinity to the nation-state.

Cosmopolitan citizenship is based on feelings of solidarity with human beings wherever they are situated and acceptance of diversity. It

necessarily challenges ethno-nationalist and other exclusive definitions of the nation: "Education for cosmopolitan citizenship ... implies a broader understanding of national identity; it requires recognition that British identity, for example, may be experienced differently by different people."<sup>361</sup>

According to Andrew Linklater the cosmopolitan argument is that 'world citizenship can be a powerful means of coaxing citizens away from the false supposition that the interests of fellow citizens necessarily take priority over duties to the rest of the human race'.

Cosmopolitan citizenship involves, Linklater argues, more than compassion towards outsiders, but conscious efforts to create universal frameworks of communication. The creation of a transnational public sphere is an essential means of realising the ideals of cosmopolitan citizenship.<sup>362</sup>

Arguably the national perspective, as adopted through the IWM and National Curriculum, is limited when considering memory and education of the Holocaust in Britain. The notion of cosmopolitan citizenship complements Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider's articulation of cosmopolitan memory in which thinking moves beyond the nation state, questioning the 'methodological nationalism' that prevails in the social sciences.<sup>363</sup> Memory and identity in this sense are no longer territorially defined.

The next section of this chapter explores how history and memory of the Holocaust are shaped through audio guides designed to support the National Curriculum for school groups visiting the IWMHE. It illustrates how and when a national perspective limits

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<sup>360</sup> Osler, "Teacher Interpretations of Citizenship Education," 2-3.

<sup>361</sup> Osler, "Teacher Interpretations of Citizenship Education," 2-3.

<sup>362</sup> Andrew Linklater, "Cosmopolitan Citizenship," *Citizenship Studies* 2, no. 1 (1998): 24-25.

<sup>363</sup> Levy and Sznaider, "Memory Unbound," 103.

understanding of this complex world event, both in history and memory, and how a sense of British identity is constructed and reaffirmed through the displays and explanatory guides.

#### School visits to the Imperial War Museum Holocaust exhibition: an analysis of learning resources

Thinking about the aims and intentions of Holocaust education in Britain, or more specifically in England and Wales, this section explores how the debates discussed above have shaped and influenced the content of the IWMHE's learning resources and the impact this has on creating and reaffirming identities through museum education. Robert Phillips argues that history on the National Curriculum has always been fiercely contested as it provides the catalyst for debate over national identity and, essentially, what it means to be British.<sup>364</sup> The National Curriculum intends to teach students the history of Britain and the wider world, however world events are considered through a national lens. The national curriculum for history aims to ensure all students 'know and understand the history of these islands as a coherent, chronological narrative, from the earliest times to the present day: how people's lives have shaped this nation and how Britain has influenced and been influenced by the wider world.'<sup>365</sup> This approach leads to the construction of a particular notion of national identity, which, poignantly, has been the subject of past debates. In the 1980s 'cultural restorationists', that is, those "'hard line old humanists of the New Right" whose central aim was the "re-valorisation of traditional forms of education"', saw the subjects of English and History as

essential battlegrounds for restoring a traditional educational agenda. Crucial in this was an attempt to influence NC [National Curriculum] working parties to restore traditional methods of teaching based upon certain knowledge. Above all, the cultural restorationist agenda sought to restore the teaching of 'British' history in schools which had been eroded over the previous decade and thus construct a particular notion of national identity.<sup>366</sup>

An analysis of the IWMHE audio guide texts for GCSE and A Level students reveals expressions of nationalism and patriotism and highlights constructions of Britishness. The IWMHE plays a significant role in defining the parameters of British national identity, this

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<sup>364</sup> Robert Phillips, "History Teaching, Cultural Restorationism and National Identity in England and Wales," *Curriculum Studies* 4, no. 3 (1996): 388.

<sup>365</sup> "National Curriculum in England: History Programmes of Study," *Department for Education*, accessed January 16, 2016, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-history-programmes-of-study>.

<sup>366</sup> Phillips, "History Teaching, Cultural Restorationism and National Identity in England and Wales," 389.

section of the thesis explores the cultural construction of identities within an educational context and carefully considers the relationship between constructions of a broadly defined British identity and Holocaust memory. This also examines the options and alternatives for the future of Holocaust memory as a part of British identity and the part it can, and perhaps should, play within the British education system.

To gain a sense of how Britishness and national identity are constructed and reaffirmed through Holocaust education within the IWMHE, this chapter uses critical discourse analysis to assess museum visitor audio guides designed for use among GCSE and A Level students visiting the Holocaust exhibition. Critical discourse analysis can, according to Thomas Ricento, help us understand

the process by which coherent models of national identity are developed, given the complexity and inherent contradictions in such an abstract notion. An important goal of CDA is to uncover the implicit arguments and meanings in texts which tend to marginalize non-dominant groups, while justifying the values, beliefs, and ideologies of dominant groups.<sup>367</sup>

Norman Fairclough argues that in a generation and society of consent, the production and reproduction of the social order depends increasingly 'upon practices and processes of a broadly cultural nature.' Part of this development, Fairclough claims,

is an enhanced role for language in the exercise of power: it is mainly in discourse that consent is achieved, ideologies are transmitted, and practices, meanings, values and identities are taught and learnt.<sup>368</sup>

Critical discourse analysis denaturalises language to reveal imbedded ideas, values and beliefs. This is central to our understanding of how Holocaust memory is constructed within a national museum and how and why the Holocaust is used by the museum within an educational capacity. Revealing the power interests behind the texts, and how power is maintained, allows for comment on the shaping of British national identity(ies) and highlights how this may be considered problematic when discussing cultural memory of the Holocaust. When looking closely at the text it is possible to go beyond what the author (in this case the IWM) is saying to consider more carefully how they are saying it and how culturally specific meanings are created.

The discourse of diversity within a framework of national citizenship provides a particular way of seeing and understanding the Holocaust. In an attempt to foster social cohesion, the

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<sup>367</sup> Thomas Ricento, "The Discursive Construction of Americanism," *Discourse Society* 14, (2003): 615

<sup>368</sup> Norman Fairclough, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 531.

Holocaust is adopted as an example, if not *the* example, of what happens when society is allowed to break down. Rather than a focus on the state apparatus, however, the Holocaust exhibition audio guides focus on individuals within society and their treatment of others in local, or national, arenas. The global context is applied comparatively, that is, to highlight differences between the actions, attitudes and behaviours of particular national groups. So, for example, the narrator of an audio text for year nine students discusses the section of the museum focusing on 'Thousands Seek Refuge'; within this the narrator, Louise Fryer draws the group's attention to a display of photographs and papers 'belonging to four Jewish families who tried to escape from Germany.' Fryer states, 'Some made it, and some didn't. It was not easy to leave, and you were not allowed to take much with you.' Continuing with the tour, Fryer prompts visitors to turn to their left where they will see a display about the 'Jewish children who came to England, nearly 10,000 of them, on special trains.'<sup>369</sup> Here Jews are shown leaving (or, more precisely, 'escaping') a threatening Germany for the perceived safety of Britain. Germany is used, in this instance, as a concept rather than geographical location; it signifies danger, threat and persecution and thus, by comparison, Britain (or, more precisely, England) comes to signify rescue and safety. While the guide adopts a reasonably critical tone in terms of presenting the Kindertransport as a scheme limited only to children, not their parents, it explains a lack of interest in helping refugees at the time as a result of high unemployment in Britain. Britons are presented as understandably protecting their own interests during this turbulent period. Britain's national concerns are given space within this section of the exhibition and used, in part, to anchor a largely European story of the Holocaust within a local, British, context.

The audio guides make explicit several themes of the Holocaust exhibition that present aspects of the history as a seemingly natural order of things, with any complexity largely ironed out. Luck as a theme of Holocaust survival is reiterated throughout the displays. Beate Green, a Holocaust survivor of the Kindertransport, discusses her feelings at leaving from the train station; forced to part from her parents. Beate's parents, the audio guide informs students, 'only escaped at the last minute by a stroke of luck. They had Spanish lessons with someone from South America, who managed to get them the right papers to go there.'<sup>370</sup> In the section on Camp Labour, students are presented with the audio

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<sup>369</sup> Leah Kharibian, Emma O'Brien and Wendy Moor, *Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition Antenna Audio: Year 9 Audio Tour*, recorded September 14, 2009 (Antenna Audio and the Imperial War Museum), 15.

<sup>370</sup> Kharibian, O'Brien and Moor, *Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition Antenna Audio: Year 9 Audio Tour*, recorded September 14, 2009, 15.

testimony, in addition to that offered within the exhibition itself, of Jan Imich, a survivor of the Nazi camp system. 'I was halfway up the hill,' Jan states,

pushing that enormous load of coal and I just slumped to the ground and started crying. It so happened that there was an SS man nearby and instead of taking his gun and shooting me, which he could have done, he looked at me and smiled and told the Kapo to let me go. Funny that, isn't it?

Following this, the guide informs students that 'Sometimes survival was just a matter of luck. But other things could be just as important.' The guide ends here, so students are unaware of anything specific, other than an unproblematised notion of 'luck', that could influence survival. Carolyn Ellis and Jerry Rawicki, however, argue that luck as a universal explanation 'shuts off exploration of the details of survivors' experiences and limits our understanding of how survival took place.'<sup>371</sup> Luck, Ellis and Rawicki stress, is a canonical response of survivors. Rawicki himself a Holocaust survivor claims 'it doesn't feel right to even consider that my survival stemmed from anything other than luck, [...] None of us had control over what happened, not those who died or those who lived.'<sup>372</sup> Luck serves as a moral explanation, Ellis and Rawicki argue, 'since it negates the idea that survivors were in any way superior to or more skilful than those who died in the Holocaust.'<sup>373</sup> That the 'best' did not survive the camps was a popular belief in the immediate post-war period, perpetuated by survivor authors such as Primo Levi. Levi assures readers the best did not survive the camps, but rather 'the worst survived; the selfish, the violent, the insensitive, the collaborators of the "grey zone", the spies. ... The worst survived, that is, the fittest; the best all died.'<sup>374</sup> Such an explanation, Ellis and Rawicki argue, was widespread after the war. 'Though reactions to survivors have grown more positive,' they argue,

the fear of not having done more to save others or, worse, having harmed others - or being perceived that way - provides other reasons that survivors might embrace luck as an explanation for their continued existence. We survived because of luck, they say, not because of anything we did or didn't do.<sup>375</sup>

Memoirs such as Pierre Berg's *Scheisshaus Luck* (2008) maintain the notion that it was all 'shithouse luck, which is to say - inelegantly - that I kept landing on the right side of the

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<sup>371</sup> Carolyn Ellis and Jerry Rawicki, "More than Mazel? Luck and Agency in Surviving the Holocaust," *Journal of Loss and Trauma: International Perspectives on Stress and Coping* 19, no. 2 (2014): 102.

<sup>372</sup> Ellis and Rawicki, "More than Mazel? Luck and Agency in Surviving the Holocaust," 103.

<sup>373</sup> Ellis and Rawicki, "More than Mazel? Luck and Agency in Surviving the Holocaust," 108.

<sup>374</sup> Primo Levi cited in, Ellis and Rawicki, "More than Mazel? Luck and Agency in Surviving the Holocaust," 109.

<sup>375</sup> Ellis and Rawicki, "More than Mazel? Luck and Agency in Surviving the Holocaust," 109.

randomness of life.<sup>376</sup> But as an explanatory device, the theme of luck is limited and, further, denies active engagement with the history of Holocaust survival. Luck as a theme of Holocaust survival masks the disparate realities of suffering and survival. Luck is associated with notions of fate, superstition and destiny. Accepting survival as a result of chance rather than conscious choice or action creates a barrier against further exploration on the methods and means of survival; no further explanation is required if we accept that survival was simply down to luck. This does suggest, however, that those who did not survive were somehow unlucky, thus making survival appear more palatable. A survivor does not suggest that he or she is any more deserving of survival by attributing this to luck, but they are, perhaps, denying any historical, social or psychological understanding of survival through the acceptance of 'pure luck' as explanatory tool.

#### Presenting the British, Jews and Nazis to Students visiting the Imperial War Museum Holocaust Museum

When adopting a policy of diversity in education, the inevitable outcome is categorisation. Categorisation is a response to diversity as it assists with making the diversity of people more understandable; to embrace difference we must first identify that which is different. As a result people become 'typical' examples of a particular group or category, with their actions and behaviours judged accordingly. William Gaudelli argues that

in order to come to terms with incomprehensible diversity we readily and naturally categorize people to make them understandable. Our cognitive structures are designed in such a way as to think categorically. [...] Once we have established categories, we begin to prejudge on the basis of those constructs.<sup>377</sup>

The IWMHE identifies the 'best representations' of certain categories (a typical British soldier, a particularly Jewish Jew, and a typical perpetrator). In doing so the museum add an evaluative dimension to the presentation by making socially and culturally influenced selections. Certain individuals are viewed as more typical of a category. In his own work, Gaudelli uses the example of a Muslim from Saudi Arabia being more typical than a white Muslim from Canada. When speaking of human categories, people most often refer to a socially recognisable identity (Jewish, Muslim, working class, male, etc.) rather than saying

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<sup>376</sup> Pierre Berg and Brian Brock, *Scheisshaus Luck: Surviving the Unspeakable* (New York: AMACOM, 2008), xi.

<sup>377</sup> William Gaudelli, "Identity Discourse: Problems, Presuppositions, and Educational Practice," *The International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 21, No. 3 (2001): 62.



people are human (higher categorisation) or talking about them as individuals (lower categorisation).<sup>378</sup>

Classification cannot reveal or reflect the richness of individual lives, experiences, attitudes or beliefs, even when discussing personal narratives. Within the context of the IWMHE, despite the personal stories littered throughout the displays, reactions and responses to these are partially based in assumptions of the inner nature of categorised groups and their relationship to outward appearance (emphasised through 'best' or 'typical' examples).

Importantly, diversity homogenises rather than engages with difference in an attempt to secure social cohesion. While highlighting difference, the museum is also subsuming differences under a specific cultural or social heading. For example, the Jewish (and other) victims presented within the IWMHE were selected to highlight the varying ages, backgrounds, beliefs, practices, and experiences in pre-Nazi Europe. The diversity is made explicit in reference to rich Jews, poor Jews, those who lived in the city, those living in the country, along with religious and political diversity. The audio tour of the Holocaust exhibition aimed at GCSE students clearly depicts this emphasis:

On entering walk over to the curved wall covered in photos. All these pictures were taken before Hitler came to power and as you look from one to another you'll see they show ordinary people from all sorts of backgrounds. In amongst the pictures you'll see a screen showing modern-day interviews of survivors talking about their childhood memories. And if you glance over to the right, you'll also see another screen showing clips from films of people on holiday, the bustle of the big cities and life in the countryside. From all this evidence it's clear that people during the 1920s and 30s lived in many different ways. Some were rich, others poor - many had different religious beliefs and ways of living. Some had strong political views, others had none. The only thing all of them have in common is that, under cover of the Second World War, they were condemned to torture, enslavement and death by the Nazis.<sup>379</sup>

In what is effectively an introduction to the Holocaust for GCSE students visiting the Holocaust exhibition, this opening passage defines a diverse victim group (the victims, in this sense, could be anyone, it does not appear important to offer specifics at this stage), contextualises the history as a part of the Second World War (and, thus, in the context of the Imperial War Museum as a whole, knowledge of the Holocaust and Britain at war becomes integral), and constructs a clear perpetrator of crimes of 'torture, enslavement

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<sup>378</sup> Gaudelli, "Identity Discourse: Problems, Presuppositions, and Educational Practice," 63.

<sup>379</sup> Leah Kharibian, Emma O'Brien and Wendy Moor, *Antenna Audio: Imperial War Museum National Holocaust Galleries, GCSE*, recorded September 14, 2009 (Imperial War Museum and Antenna Audio, 2009), 4.

and death'. While Britain has not been explicitly identified within the opening to this audio guide, they exist implicitly through their role in opposition to the Nazi perpetrator, building upon knowledge of Britain's role during the Second World War. British school children here maintain a position of onlooker (perhaps bystander) and, later, identify as a member of the rescue and liberation group.

How the audio guides, and the exhibition generally, construct these central characters has an impact on how the Holocaust is understood by visiting school groups, and how the dominant Holocaust discourse (underpinned with discourses on diversity, tolerance and multiculturalism) is understood and implemented within the British education system (including school visits to the museum within this). That, as Hannah Holtschneider has highlighted, a 'dedicated exploration of Jewish culture in Europe before the Holocaust is lacking in the IWMHE'<sup>380</sup> becomes particularly problematic when the only exposure many of the students will have to Jews and Jewishness is within the context of the Holocaust and, in particular, within this Holocaust exhibition. Holtschneider discusses a fear the museum 'might end up *teaching antisemitism by using material created by the Nazis* and that their distortions would not be conveyed' [emphasis in original]. It was concluded the exhibition should focus on the murder of six million of Europe's Jews by the Nazis and their collaborators rather than on Jewish history per se. 'The decision to reference Jewish life primarily in relation to its destruction by the Nazis', Holtschneider argues, 'has the consequence that the visitor has to explore "Jewishness" almost exclusively through the evidence left behind by the murderers.'<sup>381</sup> An analysis of the audio guides designed for use within the exhibition by year nine and GCSE school groups reveals the affirmation of negative stereotypes and associations with Jews throughout the exhibition. While often taken in the context of what the Nazis felt towards Jews, words and sentences such as anti-Semitism, hatred, evil, ugly, greedy, dangerous, second-rate people, frightening, cruel, smell of onion and garlic, enemy, outcasts, desperate, traditional, defiance, disease, and dehumanised, are used to describe the Jewish victim group at various stages throughout the audio tour.<sup>382</sup> There were very few positive words used as the exhibition aims to present the process of persecution, dehumanisation and murder, and does so largely from

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<sup>380</sup> Holtschneider, *The Holocaust and Representations of Jews*, 32.

<sup>381</sup> Holtschneider, *The Holocaust and Representations of Jews*, 32-33.

<sup>382</sup> Kharibian, O'Brien and Moor, *Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition Antenna Audio: Year 9 Audio Tour*; and Kharibian, O'Brien and Moor, *Antenna Audio: Imperial War Museum National Holocaust Galleries, GCSE*.

the perspective of the perpetrator (and, thus, using terms adopted by the perpetrator). In its only real engagement with Jewishness, the year nine guide states,

To your right is a wall covered with photos. In the middle is a TV screen. We'll look at this later, but for now, go and have a look at the photos. As you look from one to another, let me tell you about the Jews. The Jews are a people who once lived in a country called Israel. But nearly two thousand years ago their country was conquered and they were scattered. They spread all over Europe and other parts of the world, but they kept their customs and laws. Look at the photograph just to the right of the screen. It shows a boy dressed in traditional clothes, for his coming of age ceremony. Although they were spread all over the world the Jews never forgot who they were, never stopped practising their religion and their traditions.

Look at the photo directly above the screen. It shows you an ordinary Jewish family. Look at the photo just to the left of this one - here is another ordinary group of people, on holiday, just messing about like people do. But many people hated the Jews, just because they were different, because they were Jewish. This exhibition is about the murder of six million Jews and millions of other ordinary people. The word 'Holocaust' is used to describe the Nazi attempt to completely destroy the Jews of Europe.<sup>383</sup>

A similarly negative approach to Jews and Jewishness is taken by the audio guide aimed at GCSE level students,

Before you move on you can choose to take a look inside the black space just to the right. There you can find out about Jewish culture as well as antisemitism, the term used to describe hatred of the Jews. [...]

Female teenager: As you enter you'll see a glass case on your left. In this, and in the centre, are Jewish religious objects. These include a tall scroll which is a Torah, the Jewish sacred text. Also here is a seven-branched candelabra or menorah. The menorah has special meaning for Jews. It represents the ancient candelabra used in the Temple in Jerusalem, the holiest site of the Jewish faith. In 70 AD the Temple was destroyed by the Roman Emperor Titus. The Christians, who were then a minority sect of the Jewish faith, took this as a sign that God favoured only them. It was at this point, now almost 2000 years ago, that Christians began to blame the Jews falsely for murdering Christ, and hatred of the Jews began.

Over the centuries Christians were taught to regard the Jews as evil. And if you now look at the items all round the edges of this case you'll see some of the many ways antisemitism persisted into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Hatred of the Jews wasn't just confined to Germany. These cartoons, postcards, figurines and books come from Britain, France, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria, the Baltic States and the USA. All of them stereotype Jews as ugly, greedy and dangerous people. They also blame Jews for every imaginable social, political and economic problem.<sup>384</sup>

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<sup>383</sup> Kharibian, O'Brien and Moor, *Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition Antenna Audio: Year 9 Audio Tour*, 4.

<sup>384</sup> Kharibian, O'Brien and Moor, *Antenna Audio: Imperial War Museum National Holocaust Galleries, GCSE*, 5-6.

That students are provided with the opportunity to learn about Jewish culture only alongside anti-Semitism is particularly problematic. Placing these directly alongside one another suggests they are naturally partnered, that is, we cannot have one without the other. In this sense, anti-Semitism is accepted as a natural consequence of Jewishness (presumably the museum intends to make the point that anti-Semitism is a natural partner to Jewishness within intolerant societies). To state that over the centuries Christians were taught to regard the Jews as evil with no explanation serves to reconstruct harmful dichotomous positions and prejudices without providing the tools for breaking these down. To understand anti-Semitism within cultural and historical contexts requires more depth on Jewish life and culture than the museum is willing to provide. As Holtschneider has highlighted with regards to the presentation of sacred Jewish artifacts,

the presentation of items relating to Jewish self-understanding in such close proximity to antisemitic renditions of Jewishness is disturbing. [...] Although the showcase does not establish an explicit causal connection between Jewish life and antisemitism, it is not difficult to make that link, even if the curators intended merely to show that Jewish life always took place (and takes place) in close proximity to antisemitism. This benign reading, well-intentioned though it is, does not take into account that many visitors may have difficulty filling the descriptor 'Jew' in a positive way. Antisemitic interpretations of Jewish life are far easier to identify as they rely on well-established tropes. Hence the lack of sustained engagement with Jewish history and culture leads to a representation of 'Jewishness' that, through its close proximity to antisemitic views of Jewish life, is in danger of communicating antisemitic messages.<sup>385</sup>

The IWMHE offers less a detailed historical treatment of the Holocaust, or of anti-Semitism as a central aspect of Nazi ideology, its expressions and manifestations, and more a simplified illustration or example of what happens within a society that is not tolerant, accepting or diverse.

The Nazis and their collaborators are, by contrast, presented as powerful and brutal terrorisers. Set apart from 'ordinary Germans' (though reference is made to how the Nazis encouraged the German population), the Nazis are described at various intervals throughout the year nine and GCSE audio guides as right-wing, mad, smart, important, notorious, better, stronger, beautiful, proud, enthusiastic, masters, unpredictable and cruel.<sup>386</sup>

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<sup>385</sup> Holtschneider, *The Holocaust and Representations of Jews*, 36.

<sup>386</sup> Kharibian, O'Brien and Moor, *Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition Antenna Audio: Year 9 Audio Tour*; and Kharibian, O'Brien and Moor, *Antenna Audio: Imperial War Museum National Holocaust Galleries, GCSE*.

An attempt is made to encourage visitors to begin understanding what makes a perpetrator, to understand the conditions under which the Nazis gained support:

Imagine that you were out of work. Everyone looks down on you, nobody cares what you think. Then you join the Nazis and you get to wear this. It might make you feel as though you really were someone, mightn't it? Someone tough, dedicated, someone who belonged. But how would other people see you? Look at the large photo just to the right of the uniform. In this photo, on the right, you can see an SS man next to an ordinary policeman who is holding a dog. You wouldn't want to argue with the SS man, would you? The SS men who wore this uniform became hated and feared.<sup>387</sup>

Despite the exhibition adopting a perpetrator perspective and refusing to engage in any detail with pre-war Jewish history and culture, very little space is afforded individual perpetrators within the exhibition audio guides. Unlike in the exhibition, where effort has been made to identify prominent Nazis both in the section *Who Were the Killers?* and the *Nazi War Crime Trials*, the audio guide presents the Nazis as a sweeping, largely unidentifiable, force. Emphasis is placed on the acts carried out above who carried these out. The Nazis are constructed in opposition to British ways of thinking or 'British values'. This is made explicit within the year nine audio guide,

The Nazis believed that they could tell what you were like, or how clever you were, just from the way you looked. We of course know this isn't true – you can't tell what someone is like just from their appearance. Look at the long display-case. In the middle of this is a long silver case, containing samples of eye colour. Next to it are samples of hair colour. On the wall behind are photos of people having their eye and hair colour checked with instruments like these. There are also photos of people having their heads measured. The Nazis were measuring people to find out which "race" they belonged to. According to the Nazis the perfect member of the 'Master-race' should have blond hair and blue eyes, and the darker your hair and eyes the less likely that you will be one of them. They thought of people like dog-breeders think of dogs – a nice blond German child would be a prize pedigree dog, better than anyone else, and the rest of us would be mongrels.

This way of looking at human beings seems crazy to us now, but at the time the Nazis were deadly serious about it. They not only wanted to tell the different groups apart. They wanted to get rid of some people altogether.

These people included Jews, black people and the travelling people you may have heard called Gypsies. The Gypsies call themselves Roma or Sinti, and if you look over to you right you can see a photograph of some Roma people with their caravan in the background. More and more of these people were put in prison

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<sup>387</sup> Kharibian, O'Brien and Moor, *Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition Antenna Audio: Year 9 Audio Tour*, 7.

camps, not because they'd done anything wrong, but just because the Nazis hated them. The Nazis also hated Gays, and people who disagreed with their ideas.<sup>388</sup>

Firstly, to link these ways of 'looking at human beings' with the Nazis alone is simplistic and illustrates the use to which this narrative is put in highlighting the differences between the perceived extreme views of the Nazis (rather than understanding them as beliefs anchored in a particular time and as part of a broader movement) and British views, or values, today. Though perhaps more striking is the audio guide's reconstruction of Nazi categories with no indication that this does, in fact, encourage visitors (particularly in the case of young student visitors) to interpret the history presented through a limiting, unsophisticated lens.

Despite an emphasis on difference and individuality, the approach taken, underpinned by policies of diversity in education and museum environments, relies on an unsophisticated process of categorisation for comprehension. The danger here is that, in competition to maintain power and influence within wider society, individuals become identified through their broader cultural membership, which relies on the dominant discourses of society for validation. What this means in terms of the IWMHE is, while certain narratives (and individuals) fit within a widely accepted version of the Holocaust in Britain, those stories and recollections that cannot be easily assimilated to existing dominant narratives remain unheard and, thus, lost (or, at the very least, archived). As such, the personal stories used within the exhibition are used to reaffirm dominant beliefs and assumptions within Britain rather than as an attempt to understand the lives and experiences of those suffering in Europe during the Holocaust. Unwilling to engage with how Holocaust victims construct their own sense of self both before, during, and after the Holocaust, the IWMHE (perhaps inadvertently) confirms rather than combats assumptions about Others. While the IWMHE discusses Jewish victims and Nazi perpetrators specifically, this has repercussions that reach far wider in terms of how we perceive Others both within and beyond British society. Dominant Holocaust discourses in Britain define British identity through a reference to 'un-Britishness'. Nazis become the Other through a dichotomy of 'us' and 'them', which, owing largely to a heritage of Britain at war, invariably sees 'us' as heroic, just and good against an evil and brutal 'them'. This logic, however, fails to account for diversity within these groups and, as a result of this homogenisation, fails to recognise others within the Other. A consequence of this is the silencing of any narrative strands that contradict the dominant discourse (both for 'us' and 'them'). Narratives are selected for their ability to best illustrate

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<sup>388</sup> Kharibian, O'Brien and Moor, *Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition Antenna Audio: Year 9 Audio Tour*, 9-10.

the dominant discourse, thus reaffirming and perpetuating dominant positions and perspectives whilst silencing anything that may challenge or alter our perceptions of this past.

## *Conclusion*

### **Memory of the Holocaust in Twenty-First Century Britain: Today and Beyond**

The Holocaust is not only a complex series of historical events, it is also a present cultural phenomenon reflecting a society's underlying beliefs and value system. A study of Holocaust representation within the IWMHE reveals patterns in the way people perceive the world; the way they experience the world, communicate and relate to themselves and to others. How Britain engages with the Holocaust past has changed and developed over the decades, and continues to do so at a rapid rate. In the 1970s, when public awareness of genocide as a part of war grew, a national exhibition on the subject could not be imagined. In 1973, the IWM partnered with Thames Television to create the groundbreaking *World at War* (1973-1974) documentary series, which has been credited with bringing the theme of genocide to a mass audience, though discussions of material display were not entered at this time. This did, however, pave the way for a more open debate on how genocide, or the Holocaust more specifically, could be handled in the public arena. As years passed, Britain found new ways of acknowledging and relating to the Holocaust as the persecution and mass murder of European Jewry. The involvement of key individuals with a keen interest in the history of Nazism and the Holocaust gradually brought the theme to the attention of the IWM. Despite the Holocaust being considered marginal to the remit of the IWM initially, this theme was given serious treatment following the success of the USHMM, Spielberg's *Schindler's List* (1993) and an increased public awareness and interest in the topic. So powerful was the pull of a gallery dedicated to the Holocaust, the IWM adjusted its remit to accommodate. This slight shift in direction for the IWM signified a change in how the museum approached the history of British warfare and also marked how the British public would continue to engage with narratives of the Holocaust in the future. The Holocaust as a part of British Second World War history solidified its central position as a part of 'our' story, however the implications of this framework are rarely challenged. The Holocaust was, fundamentally, a human experience, thus its inclusion within the IWM - an institution documenting experiences of war - does not seem, at first sight, too problematic. When we consider the baggage accompanying Britain's war memory, however, the strained relationship between the Holocaust and the Second World War becomes apparent.

British national identity is largely predicated upon a glorified memory of the Second World War, through which it becomes possible to take a nostalgic look back to a time when



Britain was truly great. Full of Churchillian quips, images of Britain alone against a mighty enemy dominate public understanding of 1940s Britain; historical accuracy is not necessary to create the desired effect of such narratives. As this study has endeavoured to highlight, an assessment of the problematic relationship between war memory and the Holocaust in Britain is long overdue. Further than this, the impact of this on Britain's relationship with the Holocaust more broadly is cause for concern. Britain's relationship to the Holocaust in history and memory is a largely neglected area of both scholarly and public debate, though in scholarly circles this is beginning to change. Britain and the Holocaust as a subject of enquiry lags behind studies of other nations, which perhaps attests to the complexity of the relationship. Mainland Britain was not, after all, invaded by Nazi forces and the war (other than narratives of the Blitz and the Home Front) appeared to be fought elsewhere. A lack of wider understanding of British links to the events of occupied Europe - Britain did actively engage as historical actors before, during and after the Holocaust - has resulted in the development of a largely superficial national Holocaust narrative. Rather than engage with the Holocaust as a complex aspect of British history, the country's national display opts to rely on familiar, partially mythologised, narratives of refuge, war and rescue. Having entered British consciousness via this path, how Britain can relate to, and thus understand, the Holocaust is severely restricted. Britain has avoided 'facing-up' to the past as nations throughout Europe have been unable to. Without a physical landscape of destruction, Britain is able to acknowledge the wrong-doings of another nation without a need to acknowledge their own part other than through self-assuring positive narratives. This is not to suggest the IWM do not discuss some of the more difficult aspects of the British record, the refusal to allow more Jews entry into Palestine for example, they do actively engage with questions such as 'could we have done more?'. Rather than encouraging further debate, however, such questions are loaded to suggest we may have been able to do more, but at least we did something (after all, we won the war!). As a result there is little need to question British action (or inaction) and the public continue to believe Britain fought Hitler to save the Jews. The purpose here is to highlight the underlying beliefs and assumptions that inform the choices for display; in this sense, the IWMHE must be considered entirely as a product of its time and place.

Through all aspects of the IWMHE display, the Holocaust is presented as meaningful in terms of what it says about Nazism and what this, in turn, says about Britishness. From the original debates surrounding the inclusion of a Holocaust gallery at the IWM, which centred on how the Holocaust could be incorporated into a display of British warfare, to the

acquisition of Holocaust artefacts that could act as 'concrete evidence' of Nazi barbarity and criminality, the Holocaust reaffirms an image of Britain that avoids critical self-reflection despite raising uncomfortably close questions. The various display elements are brought together through the research to consider multiple strands of the Holocaust story as it is told by the IWM.

What makes a photograph a 'Holocaust photograph'? The widespread use of (often the same) photographs within Holocaust museums and exhibitions throughout the world raises questions over how photographs are associated with the Holocaust period and how this changes both our perceptions of the image depicted and memory of the Holocaust more broadly. Photographs are used uncritically as pictorial evidence of the past; proof that 'this happened'. While they can provide a visual documentation of what is shown, exactly *what* is shown is understood through interpretation. A single photograph cannot provide context, even when captioned, and thus should be handled with a critical distance museums often fail to acknowledge. Photographs instead are used within the IWMHE as an illustrative device. This study highlights the problematic constructions of victims and perpetrators through an uncritical engagement with their photographic images as illustrative of the wider historical narrative of the exhibition. Family photographs are re-presented within the display to ensure visitors to the museum understand victims as 'just like us'. But rather than engage with who the victims were (their Jewishness specifically or individuality more broadly), the IWMHE presents them as a homogenous victim group, different yet the same, which is a problematic approach in the context of discussions of diversity.

That to access the Holocaust exhibition visitors must enter through a gallery filled with tanks, fighter planes and the machinery of war is a recycled argument, it has been raised numerous times, though is still an important observation. What has been discussed less often is the objects on display once the visitor reaches the Holocaust exhibition and the relationship these have with time, place and space. The intention here is not to universalise the Holocaust, to use it as a launch pad for the discussion of other difficult pasts, but rather to allow a rethinking of how we perceive the Holocaust, to offer fresh insight and new perspectives on how we experience the past in the present and, thus, how we understand ourselves in relation to this past. This study discusses the placement of a marble dissection table as a central exhibit within the IWMHE and explores the intersections between the representation of the treatment of physically and mentally impaired patients in Germany

and the role of the museum in a building that once housed the former Bethlem Psychiatric Hospital. The dissection table is included as illustration of the 'horrors of euthanasia' in Nazi Germany, however it fails to consider a broader context of the time. To understand euthanasia as a specifically Nazi 'horror' isolates the debate in another time and place. To consider the full British context of this history, however, demands connections be made between Nazi ideas and racial theory in Britain and throughout Europe during this time. To the IWMHE visitor, the decontextualised dissection table represents the crimes of the Nazi Other without reference or acknowledgement to the eugenics movement in Britain or the development of racist ideology. Rather than using artefacts to speak superficially of distant pasts to reaffirm positive self-images in the present, museums have an opportunity to facilitate meaningful discussions that generate productive debate on contemporary and relevant issues. How the perception and treatment of psychiatric patients in the past shapes their perception and treatment today is a discussion that arises from the display of a Nazi dissection table within a war museum, but this discussion is closed off through the context of the display.

Holocaust survivors now hold a central position in Holocaust memory in Britain, but this has not always been the case. When plans began for the IWMHE, project director Suzanne Bardgett questioned the value of including survivor testimonies within the final displays. Convinced by the designers and filmmakers of the necessity, testimonies now feature in a prominent position throughout the exhibition. It is difficult to imagine a Holocaust exhibition existing without the inclusion of testimony, though less thought is afforded how the testimony is used and what this communicates to the audience. The IWMHE are responsible for shaping the life narratives of 16 selected survivors to fit the master narrative. The narratives of the testimonies are very much led by the exhibition's overarching story rather than accepting the agency of the survivor testimonies themselves. As a result, the same stories are repeated to confirm the veracity of the rest of the display. Deeper understanding is not sought through the video and audio testimonies, just illustrative sound bites to quickly and effectively translate the museum's message while also seemingly instilling an authentic and authoritative voice throughout the displays. This is intended to act as a further layer of evidence while avoiding confrontation with the constructedness of survivor testimony in this format.

The final aspect of Holocaust representation within the IWMHE this study considers is the role of Holocaust education in shaping the final exhibition, both in terms of how the IWM

chose to present the Holocaust and in how educational groups engage with the displays. A number of significant changes in education and the inclusion of the Holocaust as a part of the National Curriculum had an impact on how the Holocaust is presented within the IWMHE. The Holocaust within the context of education is placed within a lessons-based context; that is, it is explicitly used to shape school students into responsible citizens. In doing so it adopts themes such as anti-racism and anti-bullying, using the Holocaust as an example of where hate and prejudice ultimately lead. With museums and education intimately linked to the formation of identities, the educational visits organised and facilitated by the IWMHE possess a responsibility to ensure the story they tell, and the means by which they tell it, offers the opportunity for open debate and discussion on how we perceive the world and the people within it. A national museum inevitably projects an image of the nation, however by reaffirming a categorisation of people into nationalities, ethnicities, genders, beliefs, and sexual orientation, they are reinforcing rather than debunking stereotypes; they begin to rely on good examples of a particular type rather than attempting to demystify the social constructions.

What this thesis sought to identify was how the Holocaust is shaped and used within the IWMHE as indicative of a broader use of Holocaust memory within British culture and society. The arguments presented here highlight many problems with the current infrastructure for Holocaust remembrance, commemoration and education. The framework upon which the Holocaust is placed is fundamentally flawed in the sense that it further perpetuates common myths and misconceptions in relation to how Britain can meaningfully relate to the Nazi past. Despite the potential for Holocaust history to open up debate on transnational themes, it has failed thus far to challenge the dominant narrative structure of British history or, more specifically, British history and memory of the Second World War. Rather than challenge the limiting national framework through the representation of a transnational historical event, the Holocaust has been used to strengthen notions of Britishness and national citizenship. Here is a missed opportunity to actively engage in discussion and debate on migration, ethnicity, and global citizenship; what it means to be human. The IWMHE is not self-critical, but rather holds the Holocaust up as the evil Britain defeated. As we look towards the future of Holocaust memory in Britain it is vital that complex and self-aware connections are made, which explore how Britain engaged with the Holocaust in the past to truly reflect on what British values were then and how Britain plans to act on those values now. What is clear from this study is that the accepted version of the Holocaust within the IMWHE is based on a series of

assumptions that have, at best, shaky foundations, the impact of which has ramifications that extend beyond this one institution. This is reflective of a broader understanding of the Holocaust in Britain and its close relationship with memory of the Second World War. Besides lacking a full or clear understanding of what the Holocaust was, there is a blockage in Holocaust memory that disallows a moving forward and incites heated debates on how the Holocaust is or should be used. Some of those debates have been discussed throughout this thesis, demonstrating the especially contentious nature of Holocaust history and memory in Britain. With such high stakes, it is urgent that the construction of Holocaust memory be considered more carefully and closely within the various institutions throughout Britain who make the Holocaust central to their remit. Through this thesis it is hoped we are one step closer to understanding exactly what the Holocaust is in twenty-first century Britain.

**The Government's Holocaust Commission and the Future of Holocaust Memory in Britain**

There have been significant developments for the place of the Holocaust within British memory over the course of this research. While all were taken into consideration, specific comment could not be made on the influences such developments would have at the time. This postscript, therefore, offers an acknowledgement of the ongoing changes to Holocaust memory and to the commemorative landscape within Britain and offers observations on possible outcomes.

In September 2013, Prime Minister David Cameron announced the formation of a Holocaust commission to investigate whether Britain should take further measures to ensure Britain has a permanent and fitting memorial to the Holocaust and educational resources for future generations. At this stage, little reference was made to existing memorials and organisations, though the initial announcement was made during an anniversary dinner hosted by the Holocaust Educational Trust. The formal public announcement of the commission followed in January 2014, to mark the 69th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau on Holocaust Memorial Day. Two working groups were set up to investigate current provisions in Britain for Holocaust education and commemorative events, memorials and museums. The findings were presented within a commission report released to coincide with Holocaust Memorial Day, 2015. The report claims that

Britain remembers the way it proudly stood up to Hitler and provided a home to tens of thousands of survivors and refugees, including almost 10,000 children who came on the Kindertransports. In debating the more challenging elements of Britain's history - such as the refusal to accept more refugees or the questions over whether more could have been done to disrupt the Final Solution - Britain reflects on its responsibilities in the world today. In educating young people about the Holocaust, Britain reaffirms its commitment to stand up against prejudice and hatred in all its forms. The prize is empathetic citizens with tolerance for the beliefs and cultures of others. But eternal vigilance is needed to instil this in every generation.<sup>389</sup>

Here the commission sets out an explicit aim to use Holocaust remembrance and education to inoculate society against the threat of hate and prejudice. This is a problematic use of Holocaust memory, particularly as no supporting evidence exists to suggest learning about

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<sup>389</sup> Prime Minister's Holocaust Commission, *Britain's Promise to Remember: The Prime Minister's Holocaust Commission Report*, (London: Crown, 2015), 9.

the Holocaust safeguards society. While much thought and resources have been invested in exploring what currently exists in the way of Holocaust memorialisation, memory and education in Britain, little research has been undertaken on how effective the various approaches are and what their impact and outcomes are in practical terms. It seems very easy to defend Holocaust education by claiming it creates more tolerant and accepting citizens, but there is little explanation of how this is achieved or how effective it is. What happens when Holocaust education is done badly? The findings of research carried out by the UCL Institute of Education's Centre for Holocaust Research state blame should not be placed on teachers for poor standards in Holocaust education but rather suggest the

current education system does not offer an effective or compelling challenge to the limited and - in too many important respects - inaccurate popular conceptions of the Holocaust. Indeed, there appear to be a number of ways in which schools may unwittingly serve to reproduce these.<sup>390</sup>

The foreword to this research, written by Yehuda Bauer, states an important conclusion of the report is 'there are no "lessons" inherent in the Holocaust, and that any attempt to goad students to conclude on any lesson or lessons is a big mistake.' The implication of the report, Bauer claims, is that 'lessons' from Holocaust history would mean that 'somehow the future can be predicted by looking at what happened in the past, or that history often repeats itself in an accurate way, and that is an error.'<sup>391</sup> The complex relationship between various Holocaust organisations in Britain, and their sometimes opposing approaches and views, makes the community of Holocaust scholars, educators and charitable organisations in Britain splintered and disjointed. What is evident here is the lack of cohesion in the findings of the Holocaust Commission in 2015 and the Institute of Education report a year later. Where the former centres on a lessons-based approach, the latter warns of the dangers of this. These were the initial problems facing the organisation taking the Holocaust Commission Report recommendations forward.

Central to the Holocaust Commission Report are its recommendations for a striking and prominent new national memorial. The memorial is due to be unveiled in 2017 in the iconic location of Victoria Tower Gardens, next to the Houses of Parliament. Addressing the House of Commons on Holocaust Memorial Day, 2016, David Cameron stated, 'It will stand

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<sup>390</sup> Stuart Foster, Alice Pettigrew, Andy Pearce, Rebecca Hale, Adrian Burgess, Paul Salmons and Ruth-Anne Lenga, *What do Students Know and Understand about the Holocaust? Evidence from English Secondary Schools* (London: UCL Institute of Education, 2016), 204.

<sup>391</sup> Yehuda Bauer, "Foreword," in *What do Students Know and Understand about the Holocaust? Evidence from English Secondary Schools*, Stuart Foster, Alice Pettigrew, Andy Pearce, Rebecca Hale, Adrian Burgess, Paul Salmons and Ruth-Anne Lenga (London: UCL Institute of Education, 2016), ix.

beside Parliament as a permanent statement of our values as a nation and will be something for our children to visit for generations to come.'<sup>392</sup> The recommendations include reference to Britain's relationship to the Holocaust, calling for it to tell the British story through both the memorial and an accompanying learning centre. One of the objectives of the learning centre, the Holocaust Commission Report states, would be 'to help people understand the way the lessons of the Holocaust apply more widely'.<sup>393</sup> With the IWM considered as a potential site for the newly proposed Holocaust learning centre, this will have a direct impact on the development of Holocaust memory in Britain and the emphasis placed upon certain elements of Holocaust history and memory. As this thesis has demonstrated, the current model for Holocaust representation adopted by the IWM is restrictive in its ability to offer open debate surrounding many of the narratives that emerge in relation to the Holocaust. Regardless of whether the new learning centre is situated within a newly expanded Holocaust gallery in the IWM, the learning centre has been marked as the location to house an updated version of the IWMHE. In a statement favouring quantity over quality, the Holocaust Commission Report states by locating the learning centre within the IWM, it 'would benefit from being able to use the existing visitor facilities and essential infrastructure of the IWM building.' The IWM, the report claims, 'also benefits from existing high visitor numbers - almost 1.5 million last year - of which 960,000 visited the Holocaust galleries.'<sup>394</sup> The arguments for increased visitor numbers and an established infrastructure have their merits, however less consideration appears to be given to what the British Holocaust story is and how the IWM will be able to deliver this within their own restrictive framework. Many of the discussions that were had in 1995-2000 with the planning of the IWMHE were the same discussions that are repeated today in 2016 with regards to the newly proposed Holocaust memorial and learning centre, despite two decades of research and development in Holocaust history, remembrance and education in Britain. The current plans for the future Holocaust memorial and educational provisions will significantly impact upon the shape of Holocaust memory in Britain, yet it is still too soon to forecast how the Holocaust will be taught, memorialised and understood as an affirmation of British values.

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<sup>392</sup> "PM: Holocaust Memorial will Stand beside Parliament as Permanent Statement of our British Values," *Gov.uk*, accessed April, 2016, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-holocaust-memorial-will-stand-beside-parliament-as-permanent-statement-of-our-british-values>

<sup>393</sup> Prime Minister's Holocaust Commission, *Britain's Promise to Remember*, 13.

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